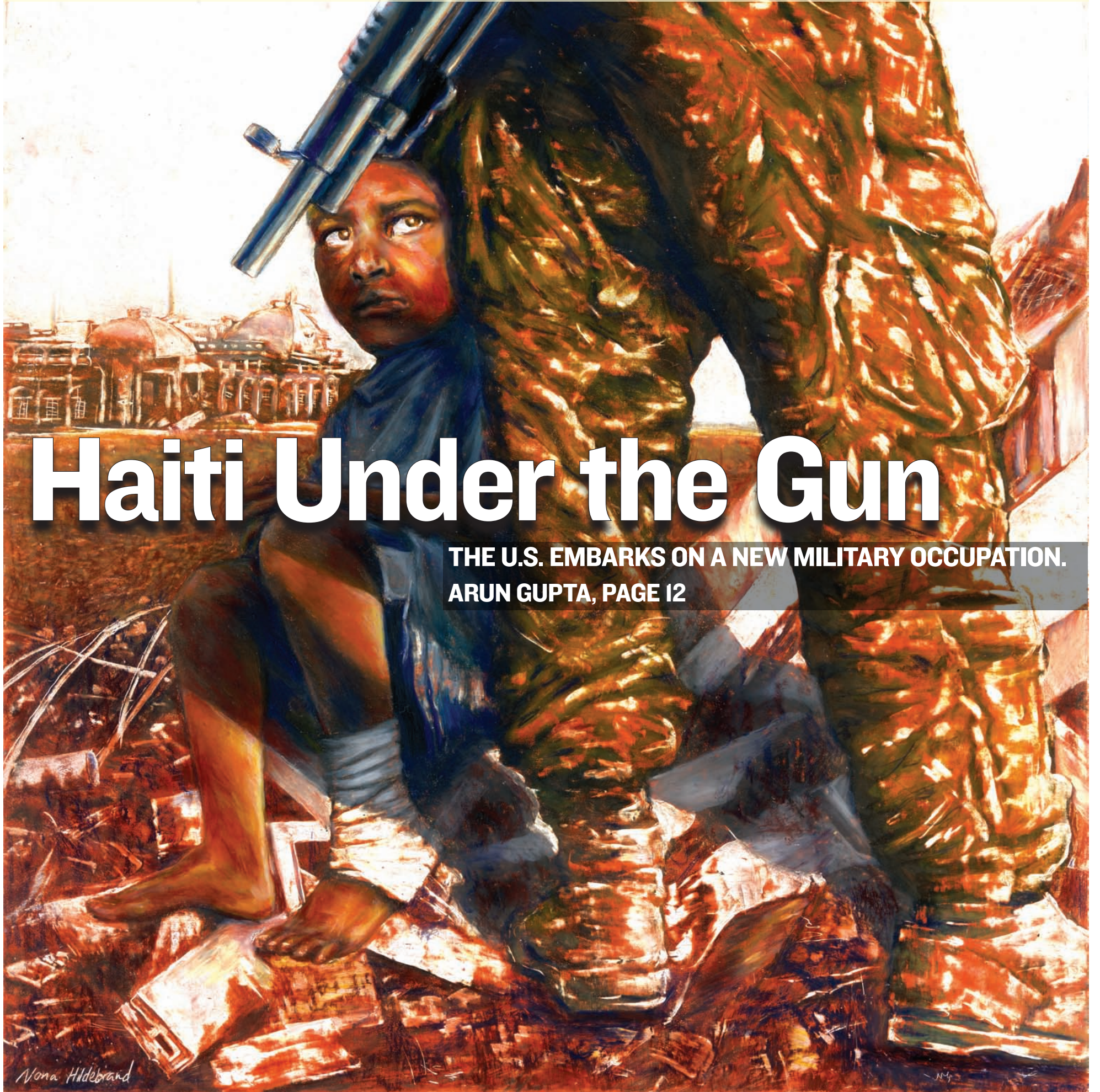


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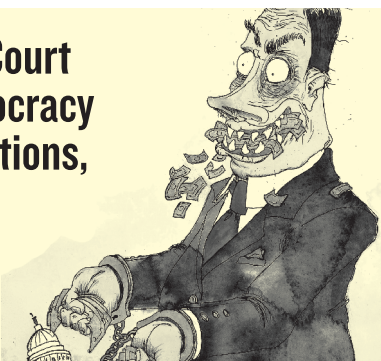
Issue #147, February 19 – March 11, 2010
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



Haiti Under the Gun

THE U.S. EMBARKS ON A NEW MILITARY OCCUPATION.
ARUN GUPTA, PAGE 12

Supreme Court
Sells Democracy
to Corporations,
p10



Climate Solutions, p7

Oscars
Exposed,
p16





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The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fund raise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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community calendar

Let us know what's happening by emailing us at indyevents@gmail.com.

TUE FEB 23

7-9:30pm • \$10/\$20 sliding scale, free for students with ID
LECTURE: "FROM THE BURKHA TO THE THONG: EVERYTHING MUST, AND CAN, CHANGE!" Writer and radio host Sunsara Taylor will discuss the various forms of oppression — from sex slavery to abuse to objectification — still present in the 21st century. Sponsored by Revolution Books.
Cantor Film Center-NYU, 36 E 8th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

WED FEB 24

7pm • \$5 Suggested donation
PRESENTATION: HAITIAN AFTER-SHOCKS. *Independent* contributors Arun Gupta and Nicholas Powers will discuss the current situation as well as the history of U.S. involvement in Haiti.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

FRI FEB 26

6pm • \$8 online/\$10 door
SCREENING: *TRAINING RULES*. Swimming legend Diana Nyad narrates this documentary examining how discrimination and homophobia in the world of collegiate sports affected numerous talented athletes.
LGBT Center, 208 W 13th St
212-620-7310 • gaycenter.org

7pm • Free

SCREENING: *SACCO AND VANZETTI*.

This documentary about two Italian-born anarchists executed, after an unfair trial, for two murders they likely didn't commit. There will be a discussion with the director, Peter Miller.
Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

7pm & 9pm • \$10

SCREENING: *365 DAYS OF MARCHING: THE AMADOU DIALLO STORY*. This documentary recounts the series of marches, protests and demonstrations set off by the 1999 shooting of 23-year-old Amadou Diallo by four plainclothes police officers in the Bronx. Reserve tickets online.
Maysles Institute, 343 Lenox Ave
212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

7-9pm • \$10

FUNDRAISER: AFRICA'S RESOURCES IN AFRICAN HANDS. This educational and cultural event will include speakers and performances by musicians and poets. Proceeds will benefit the African Village Survival Initiative, which is

establishing programs for rainwater harvesting, community farming, solar energy and economic development in Africa. For more info: 215-387-0919, philly@uhurusolidarity.org.
LGBT Center, 208 W 13th St
212-620-7310 • gaycenter.org

8pm-midnight • \$15-20 sliding scale
MASS CARNIVAL: A NIGHT OF CREATIVE DEVIANCE & LIBERATIONS. A night to celebrate winter, connect to our ancestral energies and our dreams. Drumming, dance, music and poetry. Funds to benefit Cultural Caravan for Peace & Solidarity Through Latin America.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org
culturalcaravan.wordpress.com

SUN FEB 28

3-7pm • Free
BAZAAR: THE REALLY REALLY FREE MARKET. There will be food, workshops, clothing, books and more at this non-capitalist market. For more info, email getyourfreeon@gmail.com.
Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq S
freegan.info

4:30pm • \$9

SCREENING: *DEMOCRACIES IN CHINA-TOWN: 1974-1994*. In this documentary, directed by Susan L. Yung, two women of Chinese descent discuss Chinatown after the civil rights movement. Followed by a panel discussion.
RESERVE TICKETS ONLINE.
Maysles Institute, 343 Lenox Ave
212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

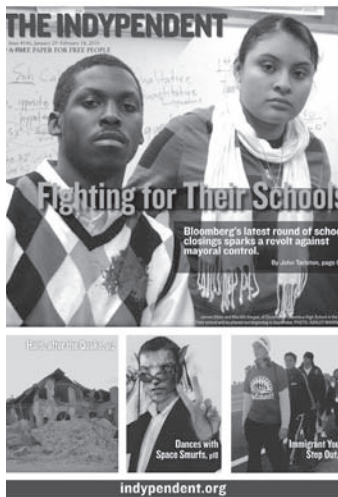
7pm • \$10/\$20/\$50 sliding scale
FUNDRAISER: CONCERT 4 HAITI. There will be an evening of dance, music and spoken word hosted by The New York Arabic Orchestra. Proceeds to benefit Haiti. For info, april.centrone@gmail.com.
The Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, 263 W 86th St
212-362-3179 • stpaulandstandrew.org

WED MARCH 3

7:30pm • \$6/\$10/\$15 sliding scale
DISCUSSION: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREE SPEECH AT CCNY. With the rise of fascism in Europe after the Great Depression came an increase of student and faculty protest at CUNY. In response, more than 50 CUNY faculty and staff were dismissed.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article or email letters@indypendent.org.



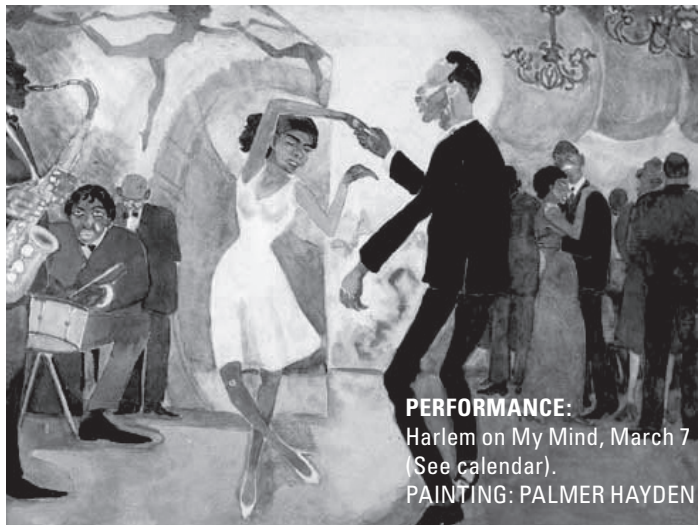
A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Responses to "Walking the Dream: Immigrant College Students Push for Reform" Jan. 29:

I check daily how those young people are doing by reading articles. You, young people are making American history. Walkers: you are truly giving the rest of the immigrants hope.
—ADAM

I admire their determination and lack of fear for what could easily happen if they end up in

FEB—MAR



PERFORMANCE: Harlem on My Mind, March 7 (See calendar).
PAINTING: PALMER HAYDEN

THU MARCH 4

6:15pm • Free
LECTURE: THE IVORY TOWER. Harvard University History of Science Professor Steven Shapin will speak on "The Ivory Tower: A History of on an Idea about Knowledge and Politics."
Heyman Center for the Humanities, Second Floor Common Room, 2960 Broadway, MC: 5730
212-854-8443 • heymancenter.org

FRI MARCH 5

7pm • \$5 Suggested donation
SCREENING: THE MATRIX OF ETHICS. More than just a stylized action flick, *The Matrix* offers a strong sociopolitical commentary.
New York Society for Ethical Culture, Ceremonial Hall, 2 W 64th St
212-874-5210 • nysec.org

SUN MARCH 7

3pm • \$10 adv/\$15 door
PERFORMANCE: HARLEM ON MY MIND. The Xoregos Performing Company will celebrate the Harlem Renaissance with three new plays by Grace Cavalieri, Kimberly Shelby-Szysko and Dave DeChristopher, as well as the music of Duke Ellington and George Gershwin and poems by Gwendolyn Bennett, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Langston Hughes.
The Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery
212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

MON MARCH 8

7pm • \$5 Suggested donation
DISCUSSION: RECLAIMING WOMEN'S HEALTH. For International Women's Day, learn about indigenous perspectives on women's health and wellness with Eve Agee.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

the wrong place at the wrong time. But immigration [reform], especially the Dream Act, has bipartisan support and could easily be passed, they are just lazy to do so. If they wait until November, the Republicans might take all the seats.
—MULTILINGUAL

CINEMA ILLUSION

Response to "Dances With Space Smurfs: A Review of Avatar," Jan. 29:

It's true that *Avatar* depicts a lush and beautiful world threat-

ened by rapacious capitalism that is saved by the spiritual local people and itself. But my immediate sense as I watched the film was sadness. I was sad because I knew that while the Na'vi would be successful and the military-industrial complex invaders of Pandora would be beaten back their real flesh and blood counterparts on Earth will not be. I see *Avatar* as a giant blue opiate pill for the masses. "Don't worry the film says, everything will be alright in the end."

—CHARGER

AFFORDABLE HOUSING VICTORY IN THE BRONX



IT'S OUR HOME: U.S. Rep. José Serrano (D-NY, center) joins tenants last July at a rally outside a building at 1804 Weeks Avenue in the Bronx that was formerly owned by Ocelot Capital Groups. PHOTO CREDIT: UHAB

BY DINA LEVY

Tenants in 14 Bronx buildings formerly owned by the Ocelot Capital Group won a ground-breaking victory over predatory equity in December. After a seven-month campaign, they got Ocelot's creditors to take a loss and sell the mortgages on the buildings to a developer that specializes in affordable housing.

The Ocelot victory "proves that tenants working together can have an impact on the behavior of even the largest, most powerful institutions and how their decisions get made," said Jill Roach of Hunts Point Alliance for Children, one of the groups that worked with tenants in their campaign against Ocelot.

The buildings were among 24 rent-regulated properties in the Crotona Park neighborhood acquired in 2007 by the Ocelot Capital Group, which was a partnership between a local real estate investor and Eldon Tech, a private equity firm based in Israel. Since the buildings were rent-regulated, they had limited profit potential and they were not in great shape. However, that did not stop Deutsche Bank from providing a \$29 million mortgage for the deal, nor did it deter the government-sponsored mortgage giant Fannie Mae from agreeing to buy the mortgage from Deutsche Bank.

With at least 60,000 and possibly more than 100,000 units of overleveraged housing in New York City, the Ocelot case is far from unique. The real estate boom of the Bush-Bloomberg era saw greedy, careless banks and Wall Street firms making mas-

sive loans to real estate speculators whose business models required displacing low- and moderate-income families to make way for higher-income tenants.

By 2008, Ocelot could not make the mortgage payments and abandoned the buildings. Fannie Mae initiated a foreclosure action. Tenants were left living in some of the worst and most dangerous housing conditions in the city.

Last June, organizers from the nonprofit housing advocacy groups the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, CASA/New Settlement Apartments and the Hunts Point Alliance for Children began working in the Ocelot buildings in an effort to deal with their terrible physical conditions and the need for new, responsible landlords. The 24 buildings had more than 10,000 outstanding code violations, many of them Class C, the most serious health and safety risks.

Residents quickly came to understand that no amount of repairs or calls to 311 would get their buildings back into decent condition. Relief would not come until the underlying debt was modified to a supportable level. For that to happen, Fannie Mae and Deutsche Bank would have to accept substantial losses on their outstanding mortgage — a reality that at first neither entity seemed ready to accept.

Legal Services NYC-Bronx agreed to represent all of the tenant associations in the foreclosure proceedings. "By moving to intervene in the proceedings, tenants were able to hold Fannie Mae responsible for the upkeep of the buildings during the foreclosure," said Jonathan Levy, the Legal

Services attorney who spearheaded the legal case. "Fannie Mae came to realize that it was not only facing a loss on the loans but also substantial liability if they did not cooperate in putting the properties in the hands of responsible developers."

Political support from U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY), U.S. Rep. José Serrano (D-NY) and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn (D-Manhattan) also helped tenants make their case to Fannie Mae and Deutsche Bank.

TAKING A LOSS

In December, it was announced that Fannie Mae had sold the Ocelot mortgages to Omni NY LLC, an affordable housing provider approved by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) with an excellent track record of revitalizing and rehabilitating distressed housing. Omni, which was co-founded by former Mets first baseman Mo Vaughn in 2004, is now committed to working with tenants, advocates and HPD to acquire ownership of these buildings and to restore them to decent, safe and affordable housing.

Most importantly, Fannie Mae sold the mortgages to Omni at a price that represents the "true value" of the portfolio — a substantial reduction from the original loan amounts. In doing so, it and Deutsche Bank acknowledged that their loans were overleveraged and accepted the cost of bringing financial stability back to these buildings.

The sale of the mortgages to Omni is only the first step. The serious problems that persist in the buildings cannot be fully addressed until Omni acquires the title to them through the foreclosure process, which could take another six months to a year.

The Ocelot tenants' determination and commitment to maintaining their communities is a template for how to preserve affordable housing that fell victim to predatory equity.

"Tenants are making a transformation from passive actors to self-empowered advocates who insist on having a measure of control over where they live," Roach said.

Dina Levy is director of organizing and policy for the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board. This article was adapted from an article published in Tenant/Inquilino (January, 2010).

Students Say: 'NO FARE!'



BY JOHN TARLETON

Under the MTA's plan, students would be charged half-fares starting in September of this year and full fares beginning in September 2011. The fare hikes would cost families with children who use mass transit to travel to school about \$800 per year, per student, and could reduce the opportunity for less well-off students to attend schools outside their neighborhood district.

The MTA faces an operating deficit of almost \$800 million in 2010 due in part to cuts in state assistance.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has called the elimination of free student MetroCards "unconscionable." However, others question the priorities of the mayor and the MTA, which is continuing to build the \$2.1 billion extension of the 7 train to the far west side of Manhattan at the behest of Bloomberg. The city is providing much of the financing for the project.

"The MTA's going belly up and the most important thing we can do is save the free student MetroCards," Assemblymember Richard Brodsky (D-Westchester), chair of the Authorities Committee, told *Metro* Feb. 4. "And some of that money is now going to build half a train line."

The MTA will hold public hearings on the fare changes and proposed service reductions during the first week of March. All hearings begin at 6 p.m.

QUEENS (MARCH 2)

Phoenix Ballroom
135-20 39th Ave., (Flushing)

STATEN ISLAND (MARCH 2)

Springer Concert Hall, 1P Building
2800 Victory Blvd.

BROOKLYN (MARCH 3)

Brooklyn Museum, Cantor Auditorium
200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn

BRONX (MARCH 3)

The Paradise Theater
2403 Grand Concourse at 187th St.

MANHATTAN (MARCH 4)

Fashion Institute of Technology
Haft Auditorium
Seventh Avenue at 27th St.

To submit testimony electronically, visit straphangers.org/testify.

Opponents of the student fare hikes will also take their concerns into the streets on March 4. On that day, supporters of public education will be holding demonstrations across the country to protest budget cuts at public schools and universities. In New York, protesters will rally at Gov. David Paterson's Manhattan office and then march to MTA headquarters. For more, see defendededucation.org.

UNHITCHED

KISS IT GOOD-BYE: Married couples take a final kiss to suspend their vows in the "UnMarriage until GayMarriage" ceremony at the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park on Feb. 14. The mass ritual, led by the Rev. Billy Talen of the Church of Life After Shopping on Valentine's Day, was in support of the right of all people to marry. PHOTO: MARK BAILEY





COLLEGE BOUND: Rubany Peña, a senior at Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School, examines tools in his carpentry shop class. After graduating in June, Peña plans to attend City College to study civil engineering. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO

By MARY ANNAÏSE HEGLAR

Ever since he was a small child, Rubany Peña knew he wanted to be a carpenter. “I always loved the city’s layout and I wondered how it was built,” Peña said. So when it was time to go to high school, he chose Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School in the Melrose neighborhood of the South Bronx. This June, Peña, the 17-year-old son of Dominican immigrants, will graduate with an endorsed diploma, which will certify him to practice carpentry in New York state. He plans to join a union and work part-time while pursuing a degree in civil engineering at City College. “It’s led me to opportunities that I never would have looked for. Smith has given me skills that I didn’t know I had or never would have tapped into,” Peña said. This option, however, might not be available for students who want to follow in Peña’s footsteps. Smith’s building trade programs — ranging from carpentry to electrical work — are on the New York City Department of Educa-

tion’s (DOE) chopping block, and the city’s Panel for Education Policy (PEP) will be voting at the end of February on whether or not to “phase down” the programs at Smith beginning next fall. The DOE has decided to allow the school’s other career and technical education program (CTE), which focuses on automotive training, to remain open. The DOE plans to replace the building trade programs with two smaller schools — Bronx Haven High School and New York City Charter High School for Architecture, Engineering, and Construction Industries (AECI). Bronx Haven will provide classes for non-traditional and under-credited students, while AECI will offer vocational programs similar to those already offered at Smith — minus the hands-on training. The co-location of AECI is part of a larger trend in Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s education policy of replacing vocational schools that offer experience-based training in building trades, cosmetology and culinary arts with schools that offer textbook-driven instruction in these same trades, as well as classes in fields that require further education at the college level, such as accounting, fashion and entrepreneurship. While Bloomberg’s emphasis on

closing public schools in favor of privately-run charter schools has drawn much public ire, the slow, yet steady, elimination of CTE programs throughout the city has received much less publicity. Bloomberg’s bent for schools that emphasize college prep instead of hands-on learning leaves educators concerned. “We should be expanding CTE instead of creating these little enclaves of privilege that are charter schools. They are bringing back separate but equal,” said Tom Newton, who left a 30-year career as a lawyer to teach special education at Smith. **DECLINING PROGRAMS** There are currently only 41 schools throughout the five boroughs with state-approved CTE programs that offer endorsed diplomas. Of these remaining programs, only six offer training in trades similar to those at Smith, and just two offer training in electrical work, though neither are as comprehensive as Smith’s program. Still, according to the United Federation of Teacher’s CTE Vice President, Sterling Robinson, there are more than 100 CTE programs in the city. “CTE is booming,” he said. However, the number of these programs that offer endorsed diplomas or hands-on training, once the defining characteristic of CTE, is rapidly shrinking. William Grady High School in Brooklyn, Chelsea High School in Manhattan, and George Westinghouse High School in Brooklyn all once offered endorsed diplomas in the building trades, but those programs have all either been discontinued or pared down. “CTE is supposed to be vocational education, but it isn’t anymore,” Newton said. It is unclear exactly how many CTE programs that offer endorsed diplomas have been discontinued, or even when these cuts took place, since the New York State and City Education Departments told *The Independent* that they do not keep records of the number of CTE programs in New York City. Several CTE educators that *The Independent* spoke with off-the-record said the lack of documentation is suspicious, at best, and that the value of vocational education is just being lost in the shuffle. Of the 1,100 students currently attending Smith, 90 percent are black or Latino males. Half are enrolled in the building trade program, which includes training in architectural drafting, carpentry, plumbing, heating, electrical work and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC). Seventy-five percent of all of the school’s graduates go on to union jobs or advanced educational programs and can earn up to \$35,000 a year in apprenticeships upon graduation, according to Smith’s School Leadership Team. The unemployment rate for male high school graduates between the ages of 15 and 24 is 25.8 percent for blacks and 16.4 percent for Latinos. “We provide students with a stimulus package. If we give students high-paying jobs and you take that away from them, it’s definitely going to have an effect on the community,” said Scott Pagan, an electrical teacher at Smith for ten years, who is also a graduate of the school’s electrical program. Of Smith’s 70 teachers, 20 are alumni of the school. **A BUSINESSMAN SPEAKS OUT** Jeffrey Smalls, who owns an electrical construction business, says he has hired students from Alfred E. Smith in the past, and knows

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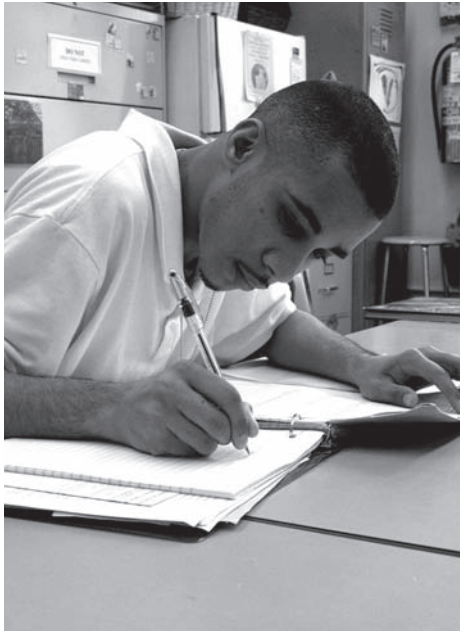
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SPEAKING OUT: Jeffrey Smalls (left), president and CEO of Smalls Electrical Construction, speaks at the Feb. 12 hearing held at Alfred E. Smith High School in the South Bronx. Smalls has hired many Smith graduates and has been an advocate for keeping the school open. PHOTO: AMELIA H. KRALES. **LEARNING A TRADE:** George Tarres (right), a senior in the pre-engineering program at Smith, works on an assignment for class. PHOTO: ASHLEY MARINACCIO



all too well what a high school education in the building trades can do for young people in the South Bronx, one of the poorest congressional districts in the country.

"We have enough of a problem proving ourselves in the workforce as minorities. Alfred E. Smith catapults students from poverty into the middle class," Smalls said.

His alma mater, William Grady High School in Brooklyn, no longer offers the electrical program he graduated from and is now on the state list of schools for closure.

Smalls, who also runs a dropout prevention program at Smith, has become entrenched in the fight to save the school's building programs. "I can't sit by and watch this. I'll be at the mayor's office every day getting arrested if I have to," said Smalls, who was named one of *Crain's* New York Businesses' Top Entrepreneurs for 2006.

Jeremy R. Cherry, an assistant project manager for Smalls Electrical Construction, graduated from Smith. Cherry, whose brother has also started a career as an electrician, is deeply upset by the possibility of the building programs being replaced by AECE.

"I would cry if this school shut down. This school is like another family to me," Cherry said.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Rene Cassnova, who has been the principal at Smith for eight years, has witnessed firsthand the challenges that her students face. Almost 200 of the school's students are en-

rolled in an evening program that allows students to make up missing credits in time for graduation, and 20 percent of students are classified as "special needs," which can range from disciplinary problems to learning disabilities. Seventy-five percent of the school's students are on free or reduced lunch.

"These students do not have the money to learn their trades through a private education nor are they able to leave the city to attend school elsewhere," Cassnova said.

Smith has received three consecutive C's on its annual report card, despite the fact that the DOE has consistently changed its grading scale without warning. CTE schools, like Smith, are being evaluated solely on their academic performance, with no consideration for the proficiency of their students in their respective trades.

The DOE also cites Smith's 46 percent graduation rate as an example of the school's poor performance, but ignores the fact that CTE students are required to earn more credits than most other high school students. Many of Smith's students also face severe socio-economic challenges that force them to take more time to finish school.

The school that is slated to replace Smith, AECE, has only been open for two years and has yet to establish a positive reputation.

The school's founder and former chairman Richard Izquierdo Arroyo has been indicted for stealing \$200,000 from a South Bronx housing organization — a scandal that also involves his grandmother, State

Assemblywoman Carmen Arroyo and his aunt, City Councilwoman Maria del Carmen Arroyo. By the end of its first year, virtually all of AECE's staff had quit.

'NOT ACCEPTABLE!'

More than 300 people attended the DOE's most recent hearing on Feb. 12, which was held to gather response to the department's proposal to phase out the building trades at Smith.

"Keeping the auto program and throwing out the building trades is like having two children and throwing one out," said Principal Rene Cassanova at the hearing. "Not acceptable!"

Smalls presented letters and petitions from his colleagues in the construction business urging the DOE not to eliminate Smith's building trades program. The DOE's proposal will be formally voted on by the PEP Feb. 24.

"Just like we need our hands," said Annette Fulton, a parent at Smith, "We need the building trades at Smith."

Rubany Peña, who has worked odd jobs since he was ten years old to help his family, wants other students to have the same opportunity for a better future that he received at Smith.

"This is what we need for the future," Peña said. "This is what we need for the community. We won't be able to get anything after this."

School Invasions

BY JOHN TARLETON

New York City's school wars continued to rage in neighborhoods across the city in February as the Department of Education (DOE) held public comment hearings on its proposed plans to install or expand privately-run charter schools inside 17 existing public schools. The DOE is also planning to relocate two schools based in Chelsea, including one that serves special education students, and to partially eliminate Alfred E. Smith High School in the South Bronx.

Concerns about the potential for classroom overcrowding continue to be a major point of friction. At a Feb. 11 public hearing at I.S. 302 in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn, parents and community activists denounced the DOE's plan to move a charter school into their school building.

"You can say we have space but you have not been in our school where there are classes of 30 students," said Alica Cortez, parent coordinator at I.S. 302.

The schools the DOE has targeted are mostly located in predominantly people-of-color neighborhoods, such as Soundview, Morrisania and East Tremont in the Bronx, Harlem and the Lower East Side in Manhattan, and Cypress Hills, Crown Heights, Propect-Lefferts Garden and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn.

"You would not pull this stunt in a good neighborhood," said Linda Gavin, a mother of four, who also spoke at the I.S. 302 hearing.

The hearings will continue at various schools through Feb. 22.

The Panel for Educational Policy will vote on the DOE proposals at a Feb. 24 public meeting to be held at the High School of Fashion Industries at 225 West 24th Street in Manhattan. The meeting begins at 6 p.m.

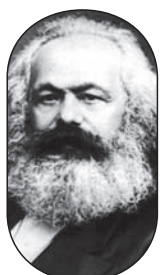
For the full list of affected schools, see http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/Proposals_Feb_Vote.htm



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THURS FEB 25 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY: HEGEL, HAITI, AND UNIVERSAL HISTORY. Author Susan Buck-Morss offers a fundamental reinterpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and points to a way forward to free critical theoretical practice from the prison-house of its own debates.

SAT FEB 27 • 10am-6pm

THEATER WORKSHOP: RASHOMON. Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory will facilitate a workshop by Marie Claire Picher in "rashomon," an improvisatory technique that highlights the role of perception in the creation of the "Other," that is particularly suited for exploring the role of individual perception in generating biases and hate.

WED MARCH 3 • 7:30PM

SLIDESHOW/DISCUSSION: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREE SPEECH AT CCNY. With the rise of fascism in Europe after the Great Depression came an increase in student and faculty protest in the United States. In response, more than 50 staff and faculty members of the City College of New York were dismissed in crackdowns by the administration, the largest political purge in U.S. academic history.

MON MARCH 8 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY: FEMINISM SEDUCED. Author Hester Eisenstein presents her book, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*

WED MARCH 17 • 7:30PM

BOOK PARTY: FUTURE FORWARD: A VISION OF SOCIALISM Talk and short baritone sax performance by revolutionary matriarchal luddite socialist Fred Ho and book signing for his most recent book, *Wicked Theory, Naked Practice: A Fred Ho Reader* (University of Minnesota Press) and his newest cd, *Celestial Green Monster*.

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SoHo's Real Fashion Victims

WAGING ACTION FOR WAGES:

Former Shoe Mania stock worker Ricardo McKenzie marches down Broadway in SoHo on Feb. 3 in a rally organized to pressure the company to pay a living wage to its employees.
PHOTO: CHARLES FOSTROM

BY DIANE KRAUTHAMER

There are thousands of fashion victims in New York City, but not due to a lack of style. Rather, these are the low-wage workers in the fashion industry who stock, cashier and provide security at high-end fashion stores. Now, these workers are fighting back against stolen wages and hazardous working conditions at several Manhattan businesses.

In a battle that has lasted more than three years, many current and former employees of Shoe Mania and Mystique Boutique are organizing to receive unpaid wages, overtime pay, minimum wage and better working conditions.

These retail workers, supported by community groups, labor leaders and elected officials, protested against two companies in the "March of Hearts" down Broadway in SoHo on Feb. 3. The rally was organized by the Retail Action Project, a community-labor partnership of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES).

"Here on Broadway, the wealth of the world lines the windows, while the people who make that wealth are starved and stolen from," said Damaris Reyes, GOLES executive director. "We want retailers to know that those who violate wage and hour laws are not welcome in our community."

At its seven SoHo locations, Mystique currently employs some 90 sales, stock, cashier and security workers. Current and former employees claim their labor rights have been violated repeatedly in the past six years, and are owed more than \$2 million in wages from minimum wage because they were illegally denied overtime pay.

"I would sometimes work for more than 60 hours per week ... and [with] no overtime [pay]," said former Mystique Boutique employee Carolina Ferreyra. "I started getting an attitude about it, [and] that's when I got fired."

Current and former Mystique Boutique security and stock workers report putting in 66-hour work weeks, while working for as little as \$5.15 per hour — \$2.10 below the legal minimum wage. In other cases, particularly among sales staff, workers say that they received the regular hourly pay for hours worked in excess of 40 hours, instead of the legally required overtime pay of time-and-a-half. There is an ongoing investigation by the New York State Attorney General's Office into the workers' claims at Mystique Boutique.

Shoe Mania is a New York City-based

shoe retail chain with four Manhattan locations that currently employs approximately 100 non-clerical sales, stock, cashier and security workers. Many workers say they have been illegally underpaid and failed to receive overtime pay due to them. Nearly 150 current and former employees have joined in multiple collective action lawsuits throughout 2009 against the company seeking approximately \$3 million in damages.

"For over three years, I worked at Shoe Mania [for] 11 hours a day, six days a week," said Ahmed Dalhatu, a former stock worker at the recently closed 11 West 34th St. Shoe Mania store. "Whenever I got my paycheck, it would only show that I worked 40 hours per week." Shoe Mania workers also report being forced to work long hours in dirty and dimly lit basements without sufficient break time.

Shoe Mania and Mystique employees are not alone. According to a recent report issued by the National Employment Law Project, "Working Without Laws: A Survey of Employment and Labor Law Violations in New York City," 21 percent of low-wage workers in New York City are paid less than the minimum wage. More than one-third of workers report that they are forced to work overtime, and in 77 percent of these cases, they are not paid overtime. Additionally, 29 percent of the workers surveyed are subject to "off-the-clock violations," whereby companies will ask workers to show up early or stay late, without being paid for that part of their working time. In real numbers, the Project estimates that in any given week, more than 300,000 low-wage workers in New York City are victim of at least one pay-based violation and, as a result, workers lose more than \$18.4 million per week in earned wages.

The living wage in New York State is defined as \$10 per hour with benefits, or \$11.50 per hour without benefits. Within the retail sector, 44 percent of workers earn less than \$10 an hour.

"If Shoe Mania were required to pay us a living wage, we would have enough to provide for ourselves and our families," said former Shoe Mania worker John Montaño.

"We will fight [and] stand by the workers until we win," Reyes said. "Solidarity is in our blood and on these blocks."

Diane Krauthamer is a communications assistant at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

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A Race Against Time

PUSH FOR REGIONAL SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE GATHERS STEAM



BY CHRISTINA GERHARDT

As the U.N. climate change summit in Copenhagen ended last December without a legally binding agreement, environmentalists, government officials and activists are asking if an international agreement is the best way to address global warming.

Many participants and observers acknowledge that Copenhagen brought an unprecedented level of attention to the issue of global warming. The U.N. climate change conference was one of the biggest global summits ever held, with all 192 U.N. member states and 119 heads of state attending.

Negotiators sought to resolve climate change by securing an international agreement around four issues: developed nations' emission reductions in greenhouse gases; developing nations' emissions reductions; funding commitments from developed nations to help developing nations adapt to climate change; and a process to monitor, enforce and verify agreed-upon emissions reductions.

Discussed, too, was the maximum temperature increase that should be allowed to occur. The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) argues that global warming should be limited to 2 degrees Celsius over 1990 levels.

Yet some nations pushed for lower temperatures, noting the devastating effects a 2-degree rise would mean. Dessima Williams, chair of the Alliance of Small Island States, many of which would disappear underwater from even a modest rise in sea levels, called for a 1.5 degree maximum. Lumumba Di-Aping, head of G77 (which represents 130 nations), said because of regional variations a 2-degree increase globally would result in a 3-degree increase in Africa, which he termed "a Holocaust for Africa."

Scientists, such as James Hansen of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, warn that if no action is taken, the planet could heat by 4 to 7 degrees over the course of this century.

As for reductions in emissions, African nations were demanding a lowering of 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020, which dovetails with the 25 to 40 percent range recommended by the IPCC.

As part of the Copenhagen Accord that

was produced at the summit, nations were asked to voluntarily declare by Jan. 31, 2010, how much they would reduce emissions by 2020. So far, 68 nations have issued pledges, accounting for over 78 percent of global emissions.

Norway proposed the biggest cut at 30 to 40 percent and was followed by Japan, which proposed a 25 percent cut. The EU proposed 20 to 30 percent, and Russia offered 15 to 25 percent. All of these offers were based on 1990 levels.

Other nations, however, proposed far less: the United States and Canada offered a 17 percent cut based on 2005 levels and Australia offered 15 to 25 percent reductions based on its emissions in 2000. Adjusted to 1990 levels, these nations are offering a 3 to 4 percent reduction.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

While some continue to tout the momentum that these commitments show — looking forward to the next U.N. climate change summit taking place in Mexico from Nov. 8-19, 2010 — or to argue for the importance of international agreements to resolving climate change, others are not so sure.

Patrick Bond of South Africa's Durban Group for Climate Justice, says that the Copenhagen Accord has three significant failings. It does not ensure sufficient cuts of 45 percent by 2020; it does not acknowledge climate debt to less developed countries (which he says should amount to \$400 billion a year by 2020) that account for little if any of the carbon emissions over the last 250 years; and a compact should include the decommissioning of carbon markets.

Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute, also, argues that international agreements will not solve climate change. "I think, and this might surprise some, that international climate agreements might be obsolete. It takes years to get them in an agreed-upon form for presentation and then ratified. I don't think we should count on Copenhagen to save civilization. We're in a race between natural tipping points and political tipping points."

Brown says, "What I see when I look around the world are movements that are promoting change without waiting for international agreements. For example, I look at

FIRED UP: Hundreds of climate change activists protest on March 2, 2009, outside Capitol Power Plant, a power plant just blocks from Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. In May 2007, the United States planned to build 151 coal-fired power plants. Through direct action and grassroots organizing, anti-coal groups have stopped 95 of those proposed plants. PHOTO: JESSICA LEE

the extraordinary powerful movement in the United States to ban coal power. They did not say we have to wait until Europe agrees or Russia agrees. They did what they thought needed to be done."

CALIFORNIA PLANNING

When California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger delivered his address in Copenhagen, he encouraged international agreements but said they will not be enough to combat global warming.

In 2006, in the first statewide mandate in the United States (known as Assembly Bill 32), Schwarzenegger committed California to a 25 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 based on 1990 levels. While California is the twelfth largest emitter in the world, 66 percent of Californians are concerned with global warming.

Terry Tamminen, former head of the California Environmental Protection Agency and an adviser to Gov. Schwarzenegger on energy and the environment, says, "I think Copenhagen revealed that it's tough to get 192 countries to agree. It highlights what cannot be done. Assembly Bill 32, however, highlights what can be achieved. Aside from what it legislated for the state, it led to numerous regional efforts: the Western Climate Initiative, which led to the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Accord."

Tamminen names just a few of the agreements designed to set regional limits for GHGs. The Western Climate Initiative consists of seven western U.S. states and three Canadian provinces; the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Accord includes six Midwest states and one province. And there's the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which encompasses 10 Northeastern states and two provinces.

Additionally, Schwarzenegger is committing California to obtaining 33 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020, up from 13 percent currently. Currently, 29 U.S. states have established targets for renewable energy production despite the lack of a national target.

MIND THE COAL

Given the legislative gridlock on reducing emissions federally, others are seeking to initiate change locally and from the ground up.

In the United States, the fight against coal offers the greatest potential for mitigating global warming. Hansen says due to its high rate of greenhouse gas emissions, coal "is 80 percent of the solution to the global warming crisis." He has called for coal to be phased out by 2030, in order to avert climate change.

The United States has the largest coal reserves internationally followed by Russia, China and India.

In May 2007, there were plans to build 151 coal-fired power plants in the United States. Ted Nace, author of *Climate Hope: On the Front Lines of the Fight Against Coal* and founder of CoalSwarm, an online information source on coal, says that groups have stopped 95 of these proposed plants.

Nace is optimistic about the fight against coal, indicating ending coal production and usage would go a long way toward solving the climate crisis. "At this rate, the 'coal problem' will be solved well before the 2030 deadline," Nace said.

Here Comes the Counter-Copenhagen

BY JOHN TARLETON

Four months after U.N. climate talks dominated by the world's leading polluters broke down, the indigenous-led government of Bolivia will host a people's conference on climate change.

"This Conference will be a transparent and inclusive event, in which no one will be marginalized," said David Choquehuanca, Bolivia's Foreign Minister, who expects 5,000 foreigners to attend the event, which will bring together citizens, social movements, scientists and officials from other developing nations.

The World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights will be held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, from April 20-22. Climate change is a pressing issue in Bolivia where retreating glaciers threaten the future of the Andean nation's water supply.

Organizers of the event are looking to draft a universal declaration of environmental rights similar in spirit to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was written in the aftermath of World War II.

They will also seek to develop strategies to push developed nations to make deep cuts in their carbon emissions and pay their "climate debt" to poorer nations like Bolivia that are least responsible for the climate crisis but will experience the brunt of its impact in the coming decades. Climate justice advocates say developed nations should provide hundreds of billions of dollars per year in financial and technological assistance to help developing countries adapt to the challenges posed by climate change.

For more, see boliviaun.org.



Bolivian President Evo Morales

THE GODFATHER OF MICROCREDIT

BY MARK ENGLER

Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladeshi economist, godfather of microcredit and founder of the now-famous Grameen Bank, enchants many different types of people with his imaginings of a better future. A popular public speaker, Yunus is a relatively short man with a silver mane, a round beaming face, and a perpetually optimistic demeanor. At his talks, he regularly draws standing ovations from socially conscious progressives, business-oriented free-marketeers and numerous personalities in between.

What Yunus has to offer, his supporters would say, is a method for ending poverty. These supporters include the Norwegian committee that awarded Yunus and his Grameen Bank the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. This makes things all the more frustrating for Yunus's detractors. Those to the left would argue that the economist is selling "free market" neoliberalism in the guise of liberal do-gooderism. Right-wing libertarians, in contrast, contend that he is peddling communitarian snake oil in a business-friendly container.

BANKER TO THE POOR

Although Yunus' Grameen Bank is not the world's first micro-lender, it is the most famous. Born in 1940, Yunus spent his late 1920s studying in the United States, earning a PhD from Vanderbilt University. In June 1972, shortly after Bangladesh won its independence, he returned to his home country to take a position as a professor of economics at Chittagong University. He dreamed he would be part of building a resilient new nation. Then, in 1974, famine struck. Yunus watched emaciated people use their last strength to travel to the cities in search of help, then slump in the streets, resigned to dying.

Yunus vowed to "abandon classical book learning," as he writes in his memoir, *Banker to the Poor*, and instead apply his knowledge to addressing rural poverty. Immersing himself in village life he met a woman who spent her days working in her mud-floored hut making intricate bamboo baskets. They were beautiful, but because the woman had no savings, she had to turn to a moneylender in order to buy raw materials. By the time she paid him off, she had only pennies to show for her efforts. Yunus surveyed the village and found that 42 people were similarly trapped in a cycle of quasi-bonded labor even though they had collectively borrowed only \$27.

Seeing the amount of misery created by such paltry sums, he offered a loan out of pocket, with the idea that the poor could pay back in small installments. The villagers were thrilled. Inspired, Yunus tried to convince mainstream banks to step in on a larger

institutions that could provide small loans to the very poor that would allow them to receive the just profits of their labors. The Grameen Bank was born. Over the next two decades it became a celebrated success. By 2007 it had distributed \$6 billion in loans in Bangladesh, expanding to serve some seven million people in 78,000 villages.

The basic idea that inspired the Grameen Bank now drives a worldwide microcredit movement. At a 2006 summit, the movement claimed to have reached its goal of providing financial services to 100 million families to help them "lift themselves ... out of poverty." Yunus posits that the poor have an entrepreneurial drive and well-honed survival skills that they can convert into household businesses if given the opportunity. Lending a poor woman \$50 or \$100 to buy chickens for a small farm, to purchase yarn for a home weaving operation or to set up a taco stand outside a nearby factory can allow her to bring in enough income to make the difference between starvation and subsistence and, over time, between destitution and a dignified life.

The Grameen Bank is widely credited with two innovations: lending primarily to women and relying on support groups to ensure a high rate of loan repayment. Yunus decided to break a significant cultural taboo and give money to poor women. "When men make money, they tend to spend it on themselves," he writes, "but when women make money, they bring benefits to the whole family, particularly the children."

To facilitate repayment and heighten a sense of accountability, Grameen gives loans to women in groups of five, so that the groups can meet regularly and provide mutual support. "If an individual is unable or unwilling to pay back her loan, her group may become ineligible for larger loans in subsequent years until the repayment problem is brought under control," Yunus explains. "This creates a powerful incentive for borrowers to help each other solve problems and — even more important — to prevent problems." Today, Grameen claims a remarkable repayment rate of 98.6 percent.

BOOTSTRAPS AND COLLECTIVISM

Yunus' social vision is a curious amalgam of left and right. On the one hand, Yunus sounds like a Reaganite, in celebrating bottom-up entrepreneurialism and railing against "handouts" and denounces the dependency created by welfare systems in Europe and the United States. Tellingly, a recent book on the movement, entitled *A Billion Bootstraps*, trumpets microcredit as "The Business Solution for Ending Poverty."

On the other hand, Yunus is harshly critical of the global economy's insensitivity to the plight of the poorest and its erroneous assumption that "all people are motivated purely by the desire to maximize profit." Some right-wing think tanks, such as the Ludwig von Mises Institute, accuse Yunus of promoting a "far-leftist social agenda." One of their main objections is that, once borrowers enter into the Grameen system, they are encouraged to participate in social programs promoting literacy and good health. All borrowers are made to learn the organization's



scale to provide a humane alternative to the loan sharks, who exact interest rates of 200 to 300 percent. When the banks refused, he devoted himself to creating

“Sixteen Decisions,” among which are “We shall always be ready to help each other,” “We shall grow vegetables all the year round” and “We shall take part in all social activities collectively.” According to the Mises Institute, these vows “read like a party platform for collectivist regimentation.”

THE LIMITS OF MICROCREDIT

A closer examination of microcredit shows that it may not, in the end, be an ideal solution. First, the concept of microloans as a vehicle for women’s empowerment appears to have been oversold. Reporting on her field study of Bangladeshi borrowers, Lamia Karim of the University of Oregon wrote in 2008 that, although women were the formal recipients of microcredit, “I found that men used 95 percent of the loans... In my research area, rural men laughed when they were asked whether the money belonged to their wives. They pointedly remarked that ‘since their wives belong to them, the money rightfully belongs to them.’”

Nor is the money always used for the purposes for which it is loaned. An article in the *Harvard Business Review* stated in 2007, “Many heads of microfinance programs now privately acknowledge [that] 90 percent of micro-loans are used to finance current consumption rather than to fuel enterprise.”

In 1989, *60 Minutes* profiled a borrower who had once been a beggar. With the help of a series of micro-loans from the Grameen Bank, taken and paid back in good faith, she was able to afford a large plot of land, a herd of seven cows, a new house with proper sanitation, education for her kids, and a small taxi for her husband to use in his own income-generating enterprise.

By 1996, however, her situation had reversed. Her husband “had contracted a stomach illness that was never properly diagnosed. To pay for his medical treatment, the couple had sold off their taxi, their land, and their cattle. She was so frail and tired, she did not trust herself to take a new loan. All they had left were four chickens.” Critics point to such instances as examples of how microcredit for

ine avenues for advancement by motivated individuals. It fosters a measure of social mobility, which in itself is a good. However, microcredit has not demonstrated an ability to reduce poverty levels on the whole.

Small loans are no substitute for the need to think big. Those countries that have significantly bettered their lot in the past century, from South Korea to Chile, have usually relied on aggressive macro-economic policymaking: state-directed development banking, subsidies for strategic industries, and public initiatives consciously designed to create decent jobs. As economist Robert Pollin notes, these policies “have all been closely associated with what used to be termed the ‘developmental state’ economic model” and have all been substantially dismantled through three decades of market fundamentalism. Developmentalist strategies encountered problems of their own, but neither microcredit nor neoliberalism can claim anything close to their successes in terms of creating growing economies and healthy middle classes.

In the end, macro-decisions can make a huge impact on micro-businesses. When millions of Mexican farmers are driven from their land in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement, loans for extra chickens appear futile. When a state enterprise is privatized, its union busted, and half of its employees fired, the micro-borrowers’ lunchtime taco stands no longer seem like such great investments.

MASS PROFIT

Today the real problem with micro-lending is that it has spawned a growing faction of practitioners who contend it must be profitable enough to attract private investment. Seeking to tap mainstream capital markets for their work, the bankers in this school prefer to use the term “microfinance” to describe their efforts.

Some predict that the number of microfinance lenders will soon dwarf the number of institutions operating on some version of the Grameen model. *The Economist* noted

banking, even Grameen and other socially driven microcredit bodies regularly deal in loans that charge between 30 and 50 percent interest. With for-profit microfinance institutions, the rates can be much higher. In recent years, reporters for *Business Week* and *The New Yorker* have pointed to micro-lenders in Mexico who charge interest rates between 110 and 120 percent.

When a borrower accumulates rapidly expanding debt, the threat of reprisal and repossession looms. It turns out that the Grameen Bank’s claim of having a 98.6 percent repayment rate is a bit of an overstatement. Yunus freely admits that when borrowers fall on hard times, Grameen is often willing to provide new funds to get them back on their feet and to reschedule old debt obligations. This makes Yunus’ institution a less successful business but a far more compassionate social institution.

However, the micro-loaning world is rife with stories of banking officers using coercive means to keep loans on schedule. Even within Grameen, women in a borrowing group who feel compelled to police one other can resort to extreme action. Lamia Karim notes that in her research it was routine to see what Yunus calls “positive social pressure” turn ugly:

“Women would march off together to scold the defaulting woman, shame her or her husband in a public place, and when she could not pay the full amount of the installment, go through her possessions and take away whatever they could sell off to recover the defaulted sum. ... This ranged from taking away her gold nose-ring (a symbol of marital status for rural women ...) to cows and chicks to trees that had been planted to be sold as timber to collecting rice and grains that the family had accumulated as food, very often leaving the family with no food whatsoever.”

‘SOCIAL BUSINESS’

Over the years, as the Grameen Bank expanded, Yunus launched several dozen sister organizations, each designed to provide ad-

ered for the first time to express humanistic values through the companies they found.”

Yunus explains that, “when you are running a business, you think differently and work differently than when you are running a charity.” Social businesses make use of private sector know-how and values — except, of course, the paramount value: glean- ing a profit for investors.

As a model of what a fully formed social business would look like, Yunus holds up a joint venture that he launched when the CEO of Groupe Danone (maker of Dannon yogurt) expressed a desire to collaborate. They created a self-sustaining enterprise that would provide low-cost, nutritionally fortified yogurt for malnourished children in Bangladesh. Their dream came to fruition. In 2007, the first Grameen Danone factory was scheduled to produce 6,600 pounds of yogurt a day — made in a new eco-friendly facility, using milk from local farmers and designed to sell for seven cents per container.

Yunus is insistent that he wants more “business” — but he wants business that would produce no profit for investors, respect high environmental standards, pay living wages and produce quality goods at the lowest possible price to benefit the poor. To many, all this will sound decidedly socialistic. To Yunus, social business is the idea that will save capitalism, satisfying a deep human craving for “meaning” that is “totally ignored in the existing business world.”

Needless to say, there are significant barriers to making social business a reality. Yunus notes that the initial funding for the joint Grameen Danone yogurt project totaled \$1.1 million. Meanwhile, in 2005, Groupe Danone had approximately \$16 billion in sales. What would happen were the social business to ever grow large enough to truly affect the multinational corporation’s balance sheets? Here, Karl Marx, who described the dynamics by which exploitative businesses are consistently able to pull ahead in acquiring new technology, and thus are empowered over time to drive their kind-hearted competitors into the ground, would

TO YUNUS, SOCIAL BUSINESS IS THE IDEA THAT WILL SAVE CAPITALISM, SATISFYING A DEEP HUMAN CRAVING FOR “MEANING” THAT IS “TOTALLY IGNORED IN THE EXISTING BUSINESS WORLD.”

the poor makes little sense absent health care, job training, and other services.

In fact, Yunus, often candid, self-critical and pragmatic, was the one who followed up on the *60 Minutes* profile and included the woman’s full story in *Banker to the Poor*. He admits, “microcredit cannot solve society’s every problem.”

Then again, no social program can. For its part, the Grameen Bank has gone far beyond just issuing loans. It has endeavored to couple its microcredit with health insurance, pension accounts and emergency funds to provide relief in the event of natural disasters.

So what is the overall impact of microcredit? Economists who assess the available data tend to agree that it creates some genu-

ine in 2005 that, “some of the world’s biggest and wealthiest banks, including Citigroup, Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, HSBC, ING and ABN Amro, are dipping their toes into the water.”

While microcredit is relatively new, usury is very old. A legion of subprime mortgage brokers, credit card companies, payday lenders and pawnshops have made amply clear that there is nothing inherently beneficent about lending to those of limited means.

The Grameen Bank’s core loans, according to Yunus, are made at a relatively modest interest rate of 20 percent. Those who have looked critically at the issue argue that, after adding taxes, fees, and mandatory savings deductions and then measuring annual interest rates using the norms of U.S.

ditional services to the poor. These included an effort to promote traditional handwoven Bangladeshi fabrics; an initiative to develop abandoned fish farms; and, most notably, a plan to provide villages with cell phone service. Grameen Phone, founded in 1996, ultimately grew to become the biggest company in Bangladesh. Out of his experiences with these initiatives, Yunus formed his concept of “social business.”

In contrast to existing businesses, Yunus argues, “[e]ntrepreneurs will set up social businesses not to achieve limited personal gain but to pursue specific social goals” — such as creating sources of renewable energy for remote rural areas or recycling waste products. The economy, Yunus writes, will be transformed by a “new breed of businesspeople, empow-

seem to have the less rose-tinted perspective on how the business world functions.

And yet, Yunus may deserve more than an eye-rolling dismissal. Here is a person who speaks of building a world not based on greed and profit, a world where markets still function but do not control vital aspects of life, and where a different type of socially motivated, cooperatively minded enterprise flourishes. Is this not something of which the more calloused and incredulous revolutionary should take note?

Mark Engler is author of How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy. Research assistance for this article provided by Sean Nortz. This is an abridged version of an article that first appeared in the Fall 2009 issue of Dissent Magazine.

CORPORATIONS UNLEASHED

LANDMARK SUPREME COURT DECISION TO ALLOW UNLIMITED SPENDING IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS

By TED NACE

Few people would describe large corporations as a sector of society suffering from a deficit of political power. Yet, corporate power increased dramatically on Jan. 21 when the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* that legalized unlimited funding of independent political broadcasts in federal elections by corporations. Like an over-muscled superhero bursting out of an inconvenient business suit, you could almost hear the buttons popping. By all accounts, the decision opens up the prospect of a major power shift in U.S. politics. Some observers even described it as a coup d'etat on behalf of major corporations and the Republican Party.

The *Citizens United* case originated from the broadcast of an anti-Hillary Clinton documentary produced with the aid of corporate funding by the conservative group Citizens United during the 2008 Presidential primaries. Under the 2002 McCain-Feingold law, the broadcast was illegal because the law prohibits corporate “electioneering” expenditures during the 60-day period leading up to a vote. Justice Anthony Kennedy, who penned the Supreme Court 5-4 majority decision that invalidated the crucial portion of McCain-Feingold, wrote, “We find no basis for the proposition that, in the context of political speech, the Government may impose restrictions on certain disfavored speakers.” In his dissent to the decision, Justice John Paul Stevens wrote that allowing corporations the unfettered power to pour money into political campaigns “will undoubtedly cripple the ability of ordinary citizens, Congress, and the States to adopt even limited

Tweed led a group of legislators who openly sold their votes for cash. In Ohio, coal and steel tycoon Mark Hannah (the Karl Rove of the Gilded Age) developed a system in which the Republican Party assessed each company with a tax on its assets and revenues. Hannah’s system was so well-oiled that he even returned money to companies that were over-assessed. Corporate money was used to purchase Senate seats, which at the time were filled by appointment by the respective state legislatures rather than by popular vote.

In 1907, in response to such overt corruption, the U.S. Congress passed The Tillman Act, which prohibited corporations from contributing money to federal campaigns. That law has remained on the books ever since, although its ban on corporate political contributions was weakened in 1971 when Congress allowed the creation of political action committees (PACs). These private organizations, which operate under the control of corporate managers, pool money collected from employees of the corporation and then use that money to make contributions to candidates.

The deployment of PACs has given corporate managers a powerful tool for influencing politicians and legislation. But because PACs get their money from employee contributions, the volume of the funding stream has its limits. According to the Center for Responsive Politics (opensecrets.org), a public advocate organization that tracks the influence of money in U.S. politics, 381 PACs gave \$39.9 million dollars to federal candidates in the 2008 election cycle, roughly \$19.9 million total to each major party.

While sizable, the tens of millions that



MICHAEL NELSON, MICHAELNELSON.COM

“I think there’s going to be a threat of corporate-funded attack ads against elected officials who dare to stand up to corporate interests. Corporations have basically been handed a weapon.”

—MONICA YOUN, BRENNAN CENTER CAMPAIGN FINANCE EXPERT

measures to protect against corporate domination of the electoral process.”

To understand the significance and impact of *Citizens United*, it is worth taking a quick detour back to the decades following the Civil War — a money-crazed period of U.S. politics that Mark Twain dubbed the Gilded Age. During that time, the rise of the first big American industries, including oil, steel and railroads, gave citizens a full taste of how corporate money could distort the political process.

In New York, Tammany Hall’s Boss

corporations make available through the PAC process will soon be dwarfed by the tens of billions that will now be available for campaign expenditures in the wake of *Citizens United*. According to Michael Waldman of the Brennan Center for Justice, ExxonMobil’s PAC raised about \$1 million in 2008 from its officers and employees. But that figure is insignificant compared to the company’s \$45 billion in profit that year, all of which could be legally used for campaign advertising purposes under the court’s decision.

Attorney Jeffrey Clements, formerly with the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office, wrote on the American Constitution Society blog, “If we take only the profit of the largest 100 corporations alone, those corporations would need less than one percent of their \$605 billion annual profits to make political expenditures that would double all current political spending by all the parties and federal candidates.”

According to some critics, corporations won’t necessarily have to spend large sums of money — the mere threat of a massive corporate intervention in a politician’s next election will be enough to secure his or her compliance. As Zephyr Teachout of Fordham Law School explains, “It’s a much subtler form of corruption, where your mind shifts to say, ‘Well, do I really want to take on that financial transaction tax if I know that Goldman Sachs is going to do an ad campaign?’”

Campaign finance expert Monica Youn of the Brennan Center agrees. “I think there’s going to be a threat of corporate-funded attack ads against elected officials who dare to stand up to corporate interests,” she said. “Corporations have basically been handed a weapon.”

President Barack Obama himself addressed the magnitude of the power shift at hand, stating in his weekly radio address that, “this ruling strikes at our democracy itself,” and adding, “I can’t think of anything more devastating to the public interest.” In his State of the Union speech, he said, “The Supreme Court reversed a century of law to open the floodgates for special interests. ... I don’t think American elections should be bankrolled by America’s most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities.”

BIG CHANGES FOR 2010

Citizens United is expected to begin reshaping the political landscape as soon as the upcoming 2010 elections. Republican candidates will clearly benefit, while the effect on Democratic candidates will be to increase the already heavy pressure to toe a pro-corporate line. To many who have watched the steady rightward march of the Supreme Court over the past several decades, creating a partisan weapon on behalf of Republican candidates was precisely the point. They compare the decision to *Bush v. Gore* as an example of the Supreme Court putting its thumb on the political scales in favor of Republican candidates.

The two decisions seem to share an affin-

ity, in another respect: Both employ highly dubious rationales to accomplish a right-wing power grab.

Although *Citizens United* focused specifically on federal elections, its rationale is expected to apply equally to local and state elections, as well as judgeships. In many of those cases, even relatively small infusions of cash to broadcast influential messaging can be expected to have a drastic effect.

DEEPLY ROOTED CONFLICT

Behind the *Citizens United* ruling lies a deep history of conflict within American society over the dangers of organized money. The Constitution was crafted by a generation that despised and distrusted corporations, particularly because of the American colonies’ experience of bullying by the British East India Company. It was that company’s attempt to exert control over tea sales — and fears that other commodities would subsequently be controlled in like fashion by the British — that led to the outbreak known as the Boston Tea Party.

At the Constitutional Convention in 1789, attempts by some delegates to empower corporations at the federal level were soundly defeated by a majority of the delegates. James Madison expressed the general view that corporations were “a necessary evil” that needed to be controlled via “proper limitations and guards,” rather than empowered. At the time, it was felt that such restrictions would be most effectively implemented as close to the grassroots as possible, i.e., via the chartering process controlled by the individual state legislatures. As a result, the word “corporation” does not appear once in the Constitution.

Anti-corporate sentiments persisted for decades after the Revolution. In 1809, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled that charters of incorporation should not be granted if the applicant’s object “is merely private or selfish; if it is detrimental to, or not promotive of, the public good.”

Expressing similar views, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816, “I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid

defiance to the laws of our country.”

Harboring a deep wariness toward corporate power, state legislatures prior to the Civil War routinely attached strict conditions to corporate charters. These included requirements that charters state a specific public service foundation, that they be renewed every 20 to 30 years, that ownership of property not directly tied to authorized activities be prohibited and that corporations not be allowed to acquire stock in other corporations. To keep errant corporations in line, state legislatures freely employed charter revocation — the “corporate death penalty.”

LOOSENING THE CORPORATE GRIP

That sort of tight control over corporations began to disappear after the Civil War, as state legislatures dismantled statutory restrictions and the U.S. Supreme Court, dominated by railroad interests, began handing over to corporations a series of newly minted rights not actually found in the Constitution (see timeline).

The most notorious example of this sort of judicial activity is the *Santa Clara* decision of 1886, which marks the beginning of a controversial doctrine known as “corporate constitutional personhood.” Prior to *Santa Clara*, corporations had been afforded a limited status known as “legal personhood,” which merely gave them the legal status to own property, initiate lawsuits and engage in other functional parts of the legal system. As the doctrine of constitutional personhood grew over time, the legal status of corporations eventually included most of the rights designated in the Constitution for human beings. It was not until the arrival of Nixon-appointed Justice Lewis Powell in 1974, however, that the Supreme Court began issuing the First Amendment decisions that gave corporations more public influence, first by declaring that political expenditures were a form of “speech,” and then by ruling that any limits on such “speech” were antithetical to constitutional principles.

Among progressives, alarm over the rise of a corporate Frankenstein has become more widespread in recent years, as has a

Continued on page 15

HOW TO FIX IT

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: Because any constitutional amendment requires approval by two-thirds of the U.S. House and Senate, as well as three-quarters of the state legislatures, such a fix is considered a longshot. Nevertheless, the problem is considered severe enough to warrant such action. Fordham University Professor Zephyr Teachout writes, “I’m usually not one for constitutional amendments, but this opinion [ruling] calls for one. Of course, if corporations can spend unlimited amounts opposing a constitutional amendment, any effort to enact one will make the 1970s campaign for an Equal Rights Amendment look like a stunning success.” So far, there are two amendment proposals. “Move to Amend,” sponsored by Liberty Tree Foundation, Ultimate Civics and Democracy Unlimited, clarifies that money is not equal to speech, and that corporations do not have constitutional rights. “Free Speech for People,” sponsored by Public Citizen and Voter Action, focuses more on allowing Congress to exclude corporate money from political campaigns.

LEGISLATIVE REMEDIES: Although passing bills is easier than approving a constitutional amendment, legislative remedies still face an uphill battle in a Congressional environment where Republicans can be relied on to mount a filibuster, and many Democrats are equally likely to remain quiet in the face of corporate pressure. There are several proposed initiatives worth following. The Fair Elections Now Act (S. 752, H.R. 1826) would provide public financing of elections and is being led by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Arlen Specter (D-PA) and Representatives John Larson (D-CT) and Walter Jones (R-NC). Sponsored by Rep. Alan Grayson (D-FL) and introduced into the Committee on House Finance Services, H.R. 4487 would require that a majority of a company’s shareholders approve any expenditure to influence public opinion. In order to curb foreign influence in elections, the America is for Americans Act (H.R. 4510) would widen the existing ban on political contributions by foreign nationals to domestic corporations in which foreign principals have an ownership interest. —T.N.

CHRONOLOGY OF CORPORATE EMPOWERMENT AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

1886

SANTA CLARA DECISION. Commonly cited as the case that established that corporations are “persons” subject to the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which meant a company had equal rights to “free speech.”

1907

TILLMAN ACT. Prohibits corporate campaign spending in federal elections.



1971

FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN ACT. Creates political action committees (PACs).

1976

BUCKLEY V. VALEO DECISION. Supreme Court overturns limits on how much a candidate can spend on a campaign. Creates the “money = speech” formulation by defining campaign expenditures as a critical component of free expression.



1978

BELLOTTI DECISION. Supreme Court overturns restrictions on corporate spending in state referenda.

1990

AUSTIN DECISION. Supreme Court affirms ban on corporate campaign contributions, but allows PAC spending.



2002

BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN REFORM ACT (McCAIN-FEINGOLD). Prohibits parties from receiving “soft money.” Prohibits “electioneering communications” by corporations, unions and nonprofits within 60 days of a general election or 30 days of a primary.

2007

WISCONSIN RIGHT-TO-LIFE DECISION. Eases McCain-Feingold ban on “electioneering communications” to allow advertisements that don’t explicitly urge a vote for or against a candidate.

2010

CITIZENS UNITED DECISION. Overturns McCain-Feingold restrictions on pre-election “electioneering communications” by corporations. Overturns Austin decision requiring corporate campaign expenditures from general treasury funds. —T.N.





The U.S. in Haiti

NEOLIBERALISM AT THE BARREL OF A GUN

By ARUN GUPTA
Illustrations by LISA LIN

Official denials aside, the United States has embarked on a new military occupation of Haiti thinly cloaked as disaster relief. While both the Pentagon and the United Nations claimed more troops were needed to provide “security and stability” to bring in aid, violence was never an issue, according to nearly all independent observers in the field.

The military response appears to be more opportunistic. With Haiti’s government “all but invisible” and its repressive police forces “devastated,” popular organizations were starting to fill the void. But the Western powers rushing in want to rebuild Haiti on a foundation of sweatshops, agro-exports and tourism. This is opposed by the popular organizations, which draw from Haiti’s overwhelmingly poor majority. Thus, if a neoliberal plan is going to be imposed it will be done at gunpoint.

The rapid mobilization of thousands of U.S. troops crowded out much of the aid being sent to the Port-au-Prince airport following the Jan. 12 earthquake. Doctors Without Borders said five of its cargo flights were turned away, while flights from the World Food Program were delayed up to two days. By the end of January, three quarters of Haitians still lacked clean water, the government had received only 2 percent of the tents it had requested and hospitals in the capital reported they were running “dangerously low” on basic medical supplies like antibiotics and painkillers. Nearly a month into the crisis, the *Washington Post* reported, “Every day, tens of thousands of Haitians face a grueling quest to find food, any food. A nutritious diet is out of the question.”

At the same time, the United States had assumed control of Haiti’s airspace, landed 6,500 soldiers on the ground with 15,000 more troops off shore at one point and dispatched an armada of naval vessels and nine coast guard cutters to patrol the waters, and the U.S. Embassy was issuing orders on behalf of the Haitian government. In a telling account, *The New York Times* described a press conference in Haiti at which “the American ambassador and the American general in charge of the United States troops deployed here” were “seated at center stage,” while Haitian President René Préval stood in the back “half-listening” and eventually “wandered away without a word.”

The real powers in Haiti now are the U.S. commander, Lt. Gen. Ken Keen; U.S. ambassador Louis Lucke; Bill Clinton (who has been tapped by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to lead recovery efforts); and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. When asked at the press conference how long U.S. forces were planning to stay, Keen said, “I’m

not going to put a time frame on it,” while Lucke added, “We’re not really planning in terms of weeks or months or years. We’re planning basically to see this job through to the end.”

While much of the corporate media fixated on “looters,” virtually every independent observer in Haiti after the earthquake noted the lack of violence. Even Lt. Gen. Keen described the security situation as “relatively calm.”

Veteran Haiti reporter Kim Ives told *Democracy Now!* on January 20: “Security is not the issue. We see throughout Haiti the population ... organizing themselves into popular committees to clean up, to pull out the bodies from the rubble, to build refugee camps, to set up their security for the refugee camps.” In one instance, Ives continued, a truckload of food showed up in a neighborhood in the middle of the night unannounced. “It could have been a melee. The local popular organization ... was contacted. They immediately mobilized their members. They came out. They set up a perimeter. They set up a cordon. They lined up about 600 people who were staying on the soccer field behind the house, which is also a hospital, and they distributed the food in an orderly, equitable fashion. ... They didn’t need Marines. They didn’t need the U.N.”

A NEW INVASION

But that’s what Haiti is getting, including 3,500 more soldiers and police for the 9,200-strong U.N. force already there. These U.N. forces have played a leading role in repressing Haiti’s poor, who twice propelled Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the presidency on a platform of social and economic justice. And the poor know that the detailed U.S. and U.N. plans in the works for “recovery” — sweatshops, land grabs and privatization — are part of the same system of economic slavery they’ve been fighting against for more than 200 years. Neoliberal reconstruction, then, will happen at the barrel of the gun. In this light, the impetus of a new occupation may be to reconstitute the Haitian Army (or similar entity) as a force “to fight the people.”

This is the crux of the situation. Despite all the terror inflicted on Haiti by the United States, particularly the slaughter of thousands by U.S.-armed death squads after each coup, the strongest social and political force in Haiti today is probably the *organisations populaires* (OPs) that are the backbone of Aristide’s party, Fanmi Lavalas. Twice last year, after legislative elections that banned Fanmi Lavalas were scheduled, boycotts were organized by the party. In the

April and June polls the abstention rate was reported to be at least 89 percent.

A new occupation of Haiti — the third in the last 16 years — also fits within the U.S. doctrine of rollback in Latin America: support for the coup in Honduras, seven new military bases in Colombia, hostility toward Bolivia and Venezuela. Related to that, the United States wants to ensure that Haiti will not pose the “threat of a good example” by pursuing an independent path, as it tried to do under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide — which is why he was toppled twice, in 1991 and 2004, in U.S.-backed coups.

SWEATSHOP SOLUTION

In a March 2009 *New York Times* op-ed, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon outlined his development plan for Haiti, involving lower port fees, “dramatically expanding the country’s export zones,” and emphasizing “the garment industry and agriculture.” Ban’s neoliberal plan was drawn up by Oxford University economist Paul Collier.

Collier is blunt, writing, “Due to its poverty and relatively unregulated labor market, Haiti has labor costs that are fully competitive with China.” He calls for agricultural exports such as mangoes that involve pushing farmers off



the land so they can be employed in garment manufacturing in export-processing zones. To facilitate these zones Collier says, Haiti and donors need to provide them with private ports and electricity, “clear and rapid rights to land;” outsourced customs; “roads, water and sewage;” and the involvement of the Clinton Global Initiative to bring in garment manufacturers.

Revealing the connection between neoliberalism and military occupation in Haiti, Collier credits the Brazilian-led United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) with establishing “credible security,” but laments that its remaining mandate is “too short for investor confidence.” In fact, MINUSTAH has been involved in numerous massacres in Port-au-Prince slums that are strongholds for Lavalas. Collier also notes MINUSTAH will cost some \$5 billion overall; compare that to the \$379 million the U.S. government has designated for post-earthquake relief.

Speaking at an October 2009 investors’ conference in Port-au-Prince that attracted dogooders like Gap, Levi Strauss and Citibank, Bill Clinton claimed a revitalized garment industry could create 100,000 jobs. Some 200 companies, half of them garment manufacturers, attended the conference, drawn by “Haiti’s extremely low labor costs, comparable to those in Bangladesh,” *The New York Times* reported. Those costs are often less than the official daily minimum wage of \$1.75. (The Haitian Parliament approved an increase last May 4 to about \$5 an hour, but it was opposed by the business elite, and President René Préval refused to sign the bill, effectively killing it. This episode sparked student protests starting in June of last year, which were repressed by Haitian police and MINUSTAH.)

ROOTS OF REPRESSION

In his work *Haiti State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, “Haiti’s first army saw itself as the offspring of the struggle against slavery and colonialism.” That changed during the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934. Under the tutelage of the U.S. Marines, “the Haitian Garde was specifically created to fight against other Haitians. It received its baptism of fire in combat against its countrymen.” This brutal legacy led Aristide to disband the army in 1995.

Yet prior to the army’s disbandment, in the wake of the U.S. invasion that returned a politically handcuffed Aristide to the presidency in 1994, “CIA agents accompanying U.S. troops began a new recruitment drive” that included leaders of the death squad known as FRAPH, according to Peter Hallward, author of *Damning the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment*.

It’s worth recalling how the Clinton administration played a double game under the cover of humanitarian intervention. Investigative reporter Allan Nairn revealed that in 1993 “five to ten thousand” small arms were shipped from Florida, past the U.S. naval blockade, to the coup leaders. These weapons enabled FRAPH to grow and to terrorize the popular movements. Then, pointing to intensifying FRAPH violence in 1994, the Clinton administration pressured Aristide into acquiescing to a U.S. invasion because FRAPH was becoming “the only game in town.” After 20,000 U.S. troops landed in Haiti, they set about protecting FRAPH members, freeing them from jail and refusing to disarm them or seize their weapons caches. FRAPH leader Emmanuel Constant told Nairn that after the invasion the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was using FRAPH to counter “subversive activities.” Meanwhile, the State Department and CIA went about stacking the Haitian National Police with former army

soldiers, many of whom were on the U.S. payroll. By 1996, according to one report, Haitian Army and “FRAPH forces remain armed and present in virtually every community across the country,” and paramilitaries were “inciting street violence in an effort to undermine social order.”

During the early 1990s, a separate group of Haitian soldiers, including Guy Philippe, who led the 2004 coup against Aristide, were spirited away to Ecuador where they allegedly trained at a “U.S. military facility.” Hallward describes the second coup as beginning in 2001 as a “Contra war” in the Dominican Republic with Philippe and former FRAPH commander Jodel Chamblain as leaders. A *Democracy Now!* report from April 7, 2004, claimed that the U.S. government-funded International Republican Institute provided arms and technical training to the anti-Aristide force in the Dominican Republic, while “200 members of the special forces of the United States were there in the area training these so-called rebels.”

A key component of the campaign against Aristide after he was inaugurated in 2001 was economic destabilization that cut off funding for “road construction, AIDS programs, water works and health care.” Likely factors in the 2004 coup included Aristide’s public campaign demanding that France repay the money it extorted from Haiti in 1825 for the former slave colony to buy its freedom, estimated in 2003 at \$21 billion, and his working with Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba to create alternatives to U.S. economic domination of the region.

When Aristide was finally ousted in February 2004, another round of slaughter ensued, with 800 bodies dumped in just one week in March. A 2006 study by the British medical journal *Lancet* determined that 8,000 people were murdered in the capital region during the first 22 months of the U.S.-backed coup government and 35,000 women and girls were raped or sexually assaulted. The OPs and Lavalas militants were decimated, in part by a U.N. war against the main Lavalas strongholds in Port-au-Prince’s neighborhoods of Bel Air and Cité Soleil, the latter a densely packed slum of some 300,000. (Hallward claims U.S. Marines were involved in a number of massacres in areas such as Bel Air in 2004.)

‘MORE FREE TRADE’

Less than four months after the 2004 coup, reporter Jane Regan described a draft economic plan, the “Interim Cooperation Framework,” which “calls for more free trade zones (FTZs), stresses tourism and export agriculture, and hints at the eventual privatization of the country’s state enterprises.” Regan wrote that the plan was “drawn up by people nobody elected,” mainly “foreign technicians” and “institutions like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank.”

Much of this plan was implemented under Préval, who announced in 2007 plans to privatize the public telephone company, Téléco. This plan is now being promoted by Bill Clinton and Ban Ki-moon as Haiti’s path out of poverty. *The Wall Street Journal* touted such achievements as “10,000 new garment industry jobs” in 2009, a “luxury hotel complex” in the upper-crust neighborhood of Pétionville and a \$55 million investment by Royal Caribbean International at its “private Haitian beach paradise.”

Haiti, of course, has been here before, when the USAID spoke of turning it into the “Taiwan of the Caribbean.” In the 1980s, under Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, it shifted one-third of cultivated land to export crops while “there were some 240 multinational corporations, employing between 40,000 and 60,000

predominantly female workers,” sewing garments, baseballs for Major League Baseball, and Disney merchandise, according to scholar Yasmine Shamsie. Those jobs, paying as little as 11 cents an hour, coincided with a decline in per capita income and living standards. (Ban Ki-moon wants Haiti to emulate Bangladesh, where sweatshops pay as little as 6 cents an hour.) At such low pay, workers had little left after purchasing food and transportation to and from the factories. These self-contained export-processing zones, often funded by USAID and the World Bank, also add little to the national economy, importing tax free virtually all the materials used.

U.S.-promoted agricultural policies, such as forcing Haitian rice farmers to compete against U.S.-subsidized agribusiness, cost an estimated 830,000 rural jobs according to Oxfam, while exacerbating malnutrition. This and the decimation of the invaluable Creole pig (because of fears of an outbreak of African swine fever), led to displacement of the peasantry into urban areas, and along with the promise of urban jobs, fueled rural migration into flimsy shantytowns. It’s hard not to conclude that these development schemes played a major role in the horrific death toll in Port-au-Prince.

The latest scheme, on hold for now, is a \$50 million “industrial park that would house roughly 40 manufacturing facilities and warehouses,” bankrolled by the Soros Economic Development Fund (yes, that

Soros). The planned location is Cité Soleil. James Dobbins, former special envoy to Haiti under President Bill Clinton, outlined other measures in a *New York Times* op-ed: “This disaster is an opportunity to accelerate oft-delayed reforms” including “breaking up or at least reorganizing the government-controlled telephone monopoly. The same goes with the Education Ministry, the electric company, the Health Ministry and the courts.”

It’s clear that the Shock Doctrine is alive and well in Haiti. But given the strength of the *organisations populaires* and weakness of the government, it will have to be imposed violently.

For those who wonder why the United States is so obsessed with controlling a country so impoverished, devastated, and seemingly inconsequential as Haiti, Noam Chomsky sums it up best: “Why was the U.S. so intent on destroying northern Laos, so poor that peasants hardly even knew they were in Laos? Or Indochina? Or Guatemala? Or Maurice Bishop in Grenada, the nutmeg capital of the world? The reasons are about the same, and are explained in the internal record. These are ‘viruses’ that might ‘infect others’ with the dangerous idea of pursuing similar paths to independent development. The smaller and weaker they are, the more dangerous they tend to be. If they can do it, why can’t we? Does the Godfather allow a small storekeeper to get away with not paying protection money?”



Compassion of the Church

BY JAISAL NOOR

Reverend Doctor Philius Nicolas has led the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men since its founding in 1973 in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Yet, this church's congregation was shaken to its core by the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti, which resulted in a death toll of some 230,000 and has left more than two million people without food, shelter and water.

"Every member of this church lost somebody in the earthquake," said Rev. Nicolas. "There is one member of my church who has an apartment building in Port-au-Prince that housed 30 people. Only one of them was saved, 29 of them died that Tuesday afternoon."

As one of the Haitian Consulate's official drop-off locations for disaster relief supplies in Brooklyn, the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men has received so many material contributions that Rev. Nicolas has no more room to store donations until the consulate picks up the more than two rooms' worth of goods that have already been collected.

This is not the first time that the 2,000 members of the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men — or other Haitian churches in NYC — have banded together to help Haitians abroad.

Pastor Testar St. Victor of Mount of Olives Church of God in Flatbush, Brooklyn, recently returned from transporting over 500 pounds of relief materials, including toilet-



SPRINGING FAITH INTO ACTION: For nearly four decades, Rev. Dr. Philius H. Nicolas has led the 2,000-member congregation of the Evangelical Crusade of Fishers of Men located in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. He is now heading up a local Haiti relief effort. PHOTO: AMELIA H. KRALES

ries, first aid items and canned goods, to the church's Mount Olives Mission in the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. The church's Pentecostal congregation of more than 2,000 Haitian members began collecting supplies the day after the earthquake.

In early March, 30 members of the Mount of Olives Church of God will travel to Haiti to deliver more aid and volunteer in relief efforts.

Despite record amounts of donations — U.S.-based charities have raised more than \$500 million in aid to Haiti, with some of

the largest amounts raised by the Red Cross (\$271 million), the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund (\$40 million) and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF (\$44.7 million) — Pastor Victor says the burden for Haiti's future will fall on the shoulders of the Haitian-American community.

"At this point it's our turn to rally and to get everyone together. It's our responsibility to go where the Red Cross cannot go. The point is it is up to us, as Haitians, to get ourselves together to rebuild. And we will," Pastor Victor said.

Beyond Port-au-Prince

BY JUDITH DE LOS SANTOS

Huddled around the lantern's glow in the middle of the night, a group of teens rap lyrics to the beat of the tambora. The light reflects on their faces as they sing about the Haiti that is to come, a stark contrast to the rest of Haiti that remains dark.

It is 3 a.m. in the tent city of Leogane, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. "This is how we stay awake throughout the night, rotating shifts and singing songs," says Sonia Pierre, about the student volunteers who stay awake at night to help provide security in the aid camps. Pierre, a long-time human rights advocate for Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic and founder of Movement of Dominican Women of Haitian Descent (MUDHA), has organized response teams into the worst hit and hardest to reach areas of Haiti to deliver food, water and medical aid.

When the earthquake hit, Pierre was at home in Santo Domingo. "I felt compelled to go," Pierre says, "the anguish kept me awake."

Within 48 hours, Pierre had mobilized a team to head into Haiti. Now seven weeks later, she has continued her effort sending in teams every 15 days. Working with partner organizations, New York City-based Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees and Socio-Cultural Movement of Haitian Workers in Dominican Republic, they have delivered several trucks full of medicine, food, mattresses, tents, portable stoves and water.

"Our response was to get aid down there immediately, because a lot of times these bigger organizations spend more time raising money and tend to cluster in places that are not the hardest hit," said Ninaj Raoul, co-founder and director of Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, of the latest mission.

Pierre has long championed human rights on the island. At 13, she was arrested for her role as a spokesperson at a demonstration on behalf of *braceros*, Haitian sugar-cane cut-

ters living in migrant *bateyes*, labor villages in Dominican Republic. Today with MUDHA, she defends the rights of women by promoting labor rights, healthcare and legal education. In 2006, Pierre was awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award for her work. Her experience gives her an intimate knowledge of the rural areas and communities throughout Haiti.

This latest convoy consisted of psychologists, social workers, doctors and nurses, 50 student volunteers and Red Cross Haiti volunteers who treated hundreds of people with medical needs in Jacmel, Martissant and Carrefour (Port-au-Prince), Leogane, Ti Goave and Grand Goave.

Trekking into remote areas in search of shack villages built beyond the main roads, the team designates areas of need and coordinates the logistics of how to organize thousands of people into workable groups to put up tents, distribute food and water, and provide medical aid. The teams can only work in the field for two weeks before needing to return the Dominican Republic to resupply.

In these outdoor bed-sheet cities, security remains very limited especially at night when women and children are most vulnerable. Pierre says that she has not seen the U.S. military visit the "tent cities" at night, despite the fact that the soldiers are well armed and able.

"They are not providing the security that was promised," Pierre says, noting incidents of beatings, thefts and rapes of women. "What this does is to compile the emotional trauma onto an already devastated community." In response, MUDHA takes on the challenge of organizing sustainable security efforts in the aid camps.

Pierre's team is also providing emotional and psychological support. Along with providing counseling, the team organizes soccer, volleyball and domino tournaments. "Re-introducing them to daily activities is paramount after a trauma-inducing experience such as this," Pierre says.

Having lost their parents, the children in the makeshift orphanages are in urgent need



TREKKING AID THROUGH THE BACKROADS: Haitian-Dominican humanitarian Sonia Pierre has been leading teams of relief workers into the most remote areas of Haiti. PHOTO: ESPACINSULAR.ORG

of surrogate care, a huge undertaking for temporary volunteers. At night, the kids do not want to sleep alone. "We take turns lying down with them, holding them in our arms — keeping them from crying, helping them to fall asleep. The smaller ones, unable to understand that the sheets would not crush them, kept asking whether the walls would come tumbling down. "The most difficult moments are those times when we have to leave the camps." Pierre says, "Many of the children are sobbing and run to hide."

These stories of need coming out of Haiti have sparked a wave of solidarity. In New York City, home of some of the largest populations of Haitians and Dominicans outside of the island, various groups have converged to offer support to these grassroots initiatives on the ground.

One such group, The Haiti Support Committee, seeks to provide supplies and funding needed to keep afloat organizations like MUDHA and Fundación Todo por la Salud, which organizes medical missions to impoverished towns in Haiti. Alba Mota, a committee coordinator, says they are organizing a March 27 fundraiser for the two organizations.

"We hope to build a bridge and show solidarity with organizations working in Haiti," Mota says.

Legal Floodgates Open

BY RENÉE FELTZ

Just three days after the earthquake, immigration officials granted Temporary Protective Status (TPS) to Haitians living illegally in the United States. Reports soon surfaced of Haitians paying as much as \$2,000 for help filing their TPS applications. But hundreds of Haitians got legitimate help at TPS Assistance events organized by The Legal Aid Society and City University of New York's Citizenship Now Project.

Temporary Protective Status grants Haitians without documentation who were in the United States before the earthquake the legal right to live and work in the United States for 18 months, and potentially longer, if the status is renewed.

The first TPS Assistance event was held in an auditorium at Medgar Evers College, Jan. 30, where 700 students of Haitian descent are enrolled. Volunteer lawyers helped complete applications for TPS and employment authorization, and applicants could apply to waive the \$470 fee (\$50 for those under age 14).

"I met people who've been here for 20 years and now suddenly realized they have an opportunity to work and make an honest days wage and be able to help family members back home," said the event's co-organizer, Jo Jo Annobil, the attorney in charge of the Immigration Law Unit for The Legal Aid Society.

Volunteers also screened applicants' criminal backgrounds to determine if they had multiple misdemeanors or a felony that would make them ineligible for TPS, but possibly eligible for a different legal status.

"Even if you're not able to help someone with TPS," Annobil said, "you are able to educate them about immigration law. They are able to go back to their community and give this information to someone else."

Annobil estimates volunteers helped complete 400 TPS applications. As many as 50,000 Haitians city-wide could be eligible.

"People have been clamoring for TPS for Haitians for a very long time," Annobil said.

The push to grant TPS to Haitians heated up in 2008 when almost one million people were left homeless after the country suffered four tropical cyclones. High food prices left 2.3 million people hungry. The Obama administration denied Haitians TPS as recently as March 2009.

The deadline for Haitians to apply for TPS is July 25. Haitians seeking TPS assistance can call 1-888-284-2772. Volunteers who want to assist in upcoming TPS Assistance events by providing French or Creole translation can contact The Legal Aid Society at legal-aid.org.

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:

Nicholas Powers writes about his journey from Bed-Stuy to Port-au-Prince at **indypendent.org**.

Corporations Unleashed

Continued from page 11

search for ways to halt the flood of corporate money into the political arena. Some activists have focused on the original *Santa Clara* “personhood” decision, especially after a 2003 book by radio host Thom Hartmann reported that *Santa Clara* itself had not actually granted corporations any such status in the first place — the “corporations are persons” formulation was actually written not by the judges but by the court reporter, who placed it in the “headnotes” that summarize the case but are not properly afforded legal status.



In revealing the illegitimacy of the *Santa Clara* decision, Hartmann had hoped to invalidate the entire edifice of corporate rights. “Boy, was I naïve,” he recently said. Although the case was indeed improperly used as precedent for later decisions, those decisions still stand, as does the “corporations are persons” formulation itself. Mak-

ing matters worse for those seeking to stop the corporate juggernaut, Supreme Court decisions in recent decades have, in general, taken pains to avoid resting their rationales on the personhood status of the corporation. Rather, justices like Anthony Kennedy have maintained that removal of restrictions on corporate political expenditures interferes with the First Amendment principle that “voters must be free to obtain information from diverse sources in order to determine how to cast their votes.”

Critics have responded that, in reality, overwhelming corporate advertising, rather than supplying the public with useful information, tends to drown out all competing voices by inundating the public. They assert that if corporations can determine the outcome of elections through overwhelming expenditures on advertis-

ing, then democracy becomes merely a sham or a formality. In his dissent, Justice Stevens emphasized that point: “A democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold.”

Some legal experts have pointed out that the concept of “free speech” is an oxymoron when applied to corporate expenditures on advertising. According to Hofstra Law School professor Daniel Greenwood, a corporate manager is specifically required by state law to act in the corporate interest, rather than follow his or her own conscience, and so is prohibited from speaking freely.

TAKING ACTION

Progressive activists have been quick to react to the *Citizens United* decision, announcing two initiatives to bottle up the corporate genie by amending the constitution. The first effort, known as Move to Amend, is sponsored by an alliance of groups that includes Liberty Tree Foundation, Ultimate Civics and Democracy Unlimited. It advocates a multi-part Constitutional amendment that would clarify that political expenditures are not equivalent to speech and that corporations do not have constitutional rights, as well as offering increased protections for voters and local communities.

Riki Ott of Ultimate Civics says that Supreme Court decisions granting constitutional rights to corporations have “allowed a consolidation of wealth and power to the corporations that now threatens to destroy the republic. [Just as we once needed to]

separate church and state; we now need to separate corporation and state.”

The other effort, known as Free Speech for People, is sponsored by Public Citizen, Voter Action, the Center for Corporate Policy and the American Independent Business Alliance. It advocates a narrower amendment that would correct the First Amendment claims of corporations and their supporters on the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, several members of Congress, including Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY), have proposed corrective legislation. Proposals include measures to exclude foreign-owned corporations from campaigning privileges, measures to require disclosure of corporate political spending and measures to require that corporate shareholders be consulted prior to the spending of any corporate money on political influence.

Of course, the passage of any corrective measures faces a serious obstacle: the new spending powers of corporations created by *Citizens United* decision itself. Given the demonstrated reluctance of most legislators to defy even a single corporate sector, whether that be Big Pharma, military contractors, or Wall Street, how likely is it that those same legislators will have the courage to defy the corporation?

Ted Nace is the author of Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabling of Democracy (Berrett-Koehler, 2003, 2005).

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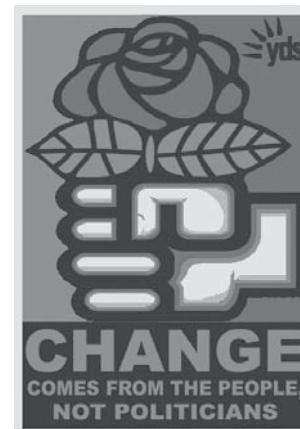
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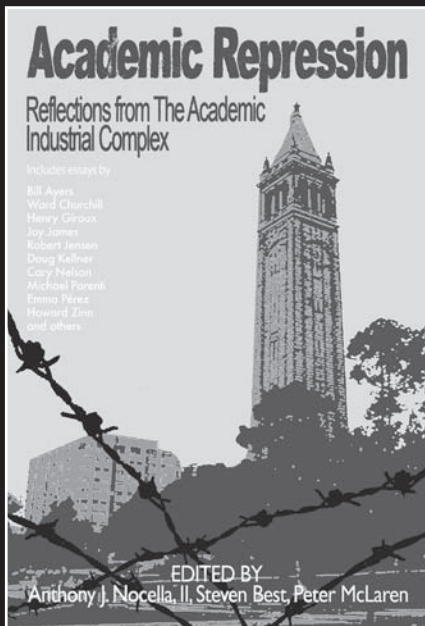
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ACADEMY AWARDS

Political Films to Test Oscars

Though “Oscar” is getting older — this year marks the 82nd awards ceremony for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences — movie lovers will have to wait until March 7 to find out whether or not he has, in fact, become wiser.

For the first time since 1944, there will be 10 nominees (instead of only five) for the coveted Best Picture Oscar.

For only the second time in all those years, one of the Best Picture nominees will be a movie directed by a woman (Kathryn Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker*), and, for the very first time, another nominee will be a movie directed by a Black man (Lee Daniels’ *Precious*).

WAR’S MIDDLE GROUND

No woman-directed movie has ever been named Best Picture (only one other has been nominated, out of some 450 nominees). On the other hand, 16 out of 81 Best Pictures have been war movies, one of which was actually an antiwar movie.

What makes a war movie an antiwar movie? Essentially, making the point — like, for instance, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1930’s top winner — that war is horrible and never worth the price. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those that show war and slaughter as the ultimate test of manhood. Most, however, have occupied a middle ground: War is a dirty job but somebody has to do it, they declare, a position that essentially supports the (pro-war) status quo by failing to challenge it.

The Hurt Locker, a rarity in many respects — a war movie made by a woman, a character-driven action movie, and a woman-directed movie with almost no women in it — nevertheless fits into that large middle ground. It tells the story of three members of a bomb disposal unit in occupied Iraq, a story driven by the intense and moving portrayal by Jeremy Renner as the squad leader hooked on the adrenaline rush of his dangerous business. (“War is a drug,” declares an epigraph, quoting from the Chris Hedges book, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*; the film’s title apparently refers to the protagonist’s collection of bomb fuses and detonators he’s removed from live bombs.) With equally nuanced performances by Anthony Mackie and Brian Geraghty as his colleagues, who are constantly endangered by his passion for risk, its tight focus on the three soldiers’ shifting emotions make it one of the most intimate of the genre ever filmed. Yet by positing the three as heroic saviors of the Iraqi people who can’t protect themselves against the evil Iraqi bomb-setting insurgents, *The Hurt Locker* accepts and approves the occupation of Iraq. It is a strong film; it is a convincing film; it is not an antiwar film (which is probably a good thing for its Oscar chances).



A ‘PRECIOUS’ EVENT

On the other hand, *Precious* is a longer-than-long shot. No movie directed by a Black person has ever been nominated as Best Picture; only a handful of films primarily about Black lives (*Souther, A Soldier’s Story*, *The Color Purple* and *Ray*) have been nominated, all of them directed by white men. None of them won, nor did any of those nominees tell a tale as grim — at least in its beginning — as does *Precious*, the story of an obese, illiterate Black teenager twice impregnated and (Caution: Spoiler to follow!) infected with HIV by her own father.

At that, *Precious* — its full title is *Precious, Based on the Novel “Push” by Sapphire* — omits from its catalog of horrors some of the grimmest aspects of Sapphire’s novel, which describes a young woman sexually abused since early childhood by both her parents. Unfortunately, the film version also fails to convincingly depict the ultimate victory that the novel’s Precious wins over her circumstances. In the novel, the horrors serve to throw into dramatic relief her slow and patient struggle up from illiteracy; in the film, she suddenly and for no discernible reason “gets it” and can read.

Even more than in *The Hurt*

Locker, the powerful and compelling lead performances — by Gabourey Sidibe as Claireece Precious Jones and standup comic/actor Mo’Nique as her battering and rage-filled mother, Mary — carry the film. As in *The Hurt Locker*, other characters (including those played by performers as famous as Mariah Carey and Lenny Kravitz) seem to exist only as they interact with the central characters. In the end, the film *Precious* is neither as harrowing nor as uplifting as the book from which it is derived.

THE ODDS

So on March 7, who will hear the magic words, “And the Oscar goes to ... ?” Will 2010 go down in Academy history as the Year of the Woman? Will it be the Year of the Black movie?

This critic says not yet. Kathryn Bigelow will be outshone by her ex-husband, James Cameron; the Black characters will lose to the blue ones. Alas, this will be yet another Year of White Guy Dances with Natives of Color and Saves Them: *Avatar*, all the way (except for acting awards, which will go to *The Hurt Locker* and *Precious* as consolation prizes).

Prove me wrong, Academy. Please.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK

PEOPLES’ VOICE



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Your Own James

You Don't Play with Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James
AK PRESS, 2009
C.L.R. JAMES AND DAVID AUSTIN (EDITOR)

Martin Glaberman, a long-time associate of C.L.R. James, once observed that the staggering scope of James' writing often meant, "Everyone produces his/her own James. People have, over the years, taken from him what they found useful, and imputed to him what they found necessary. James as cultural critic, James as master of the classics, James as expert on cricket, James as historian, James as major figure in the pan-African movement...."

A cursory glance at *You Don't Play with Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, mostly a collection of talks delivered to a group of West Indian students living in Montreal from 1966 to 1967, shows the breadth of James' interests (the book is supplemented with interviews with James and letters from, to and about the scholar). Among the topics discussed are Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* as it relates to the Caribbean; the Haitian Revolution, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the making of the Caribbean people, and Lenin's views on labor unions.

James, a Marxist journalist, essayist and social theorist, is perhaps best known for his 1938 masterwork on the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*. He made it his life's work to examine the movement of historical forces from below and the response of those in power to these efforts. Lectures "The Making of the Caribbean People" and "The Haitian Revolution and the Making of the Modern World," both included in *You Don't Play with Revolution*, revisit this theme, which, given the current tragedy in Haiti, is as important as ever. James ties together the ways slaves organized themselves in order to run the West Indian plantations, the amazing defeat of the British army at the hands of the Haitians in 1791, the Haitian revolution and its importance to the French Revolution. He extends the analysis to emphasize the role of the creative resistance of American slaves in inspiring the abolitionist movement.

A close study of Black Americans had helped James, who was born in 1901 in Trinidad and Tobago, then a British colony, arrive at some of his most important theoretical breakthroughs, particularly his rejection of the Leninist concept of the vanguard party. In 1938, at the behest of Leon Trotsky and his U.S. lieutenant James P. Cannon, James came to the United States from London largely to help the Socialist Workers Party determine its stance on the "Negro Question." He came to the conclusion that

American Blacks didn't need to have a Leninist organization imposed on them and soon rejected the entire notion of the revolutionary vanguard.

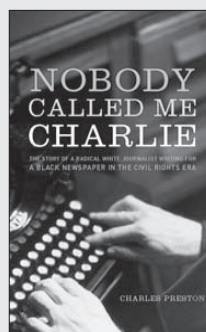
James grapples with Lenin's writings on labor as well. The book dedicates three chapters to James' views on "Lenin and the Trade Union Debate in Russia," which lays out a close reading of Lenin's public statements on the need for workers' autonomy. This view directly contradicted that of Trotsky, who argued for more bureaucracy and increased state control over workers' organizations (and later for the militarization of the working class). It's impossible to accept Lenin's proclamations at face value — in practice, Lenin and the Bolsheviks beefed up the power of the Bolshevik party at the expense of the Soviets (workers' councils) and other workers' organizations. David Austin, the book's editor, could have provided a note to clarify James' apparent Lenin paradox — even though James rejected Lenin's idea of the vanguard party, he believed that Lenin only used that organizational form out of necessity. Kent Worcester explains in his excellent *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, "A pronounced sympathy for Lenin's own method and practice did not, it seems, preclude a break with a core proposition of Marxist-Leninist politics."

Many of those James worked with or directly influenced attained some degree, however compromised, of state power — Kwame Nkrumah, Eric Williams and Jomo Kenyatta, the first prime ministers of Ghana, Trinidad and Kenya, respectively, maintained close contact with James throughout their political careers. None of these figures is dealt with uncritically here. Throughout the volume, James' jabs at Williams, like his digs against Trotsky, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre and Isaac Deutscher, never come across as petty resentment. Through debating and arguing against these characters, he earned his stripes (and his snipes).

The spectrum of these lectures can be a bit daunting, but the book's breadth makes the collection useful to both novices looking for a starting point and initiates alike. Still, the inclusion of a much-needed index at the expense of some of the correspondence between some of James' obscure acolytes would have made the book easier to digest.

—RICO CLEFFI

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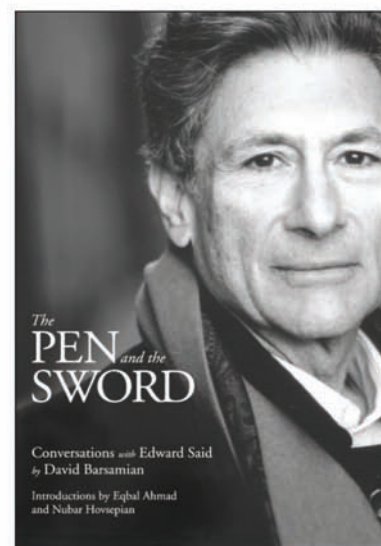
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Introductions by Eqbal Ahmad and Nubar Hovsepien

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Following the 1993 Oslo accords, Said tells Barsamian, "The idea of a collective memory is now rapidly becoming disallowed even by Palestinians. That's something which I find unacceptable." From this collection emerges a history that is both haunting—imbued with knowledge of loss and desire for justice for all Palestinians—and urgently needed to understand today's conflict.

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Wastelands

Mural

By Mahmoud Darwish,
Translation by Rema Hammami
and John Berger
VERSO, 2009

“Something is wrong with America’s moral imagination,” said former U.S. poet laureate Robert Hass told the audience at the most recent Dodge poetry festival in New Jersey in fall 2008.

He was lamenting the loss of voices, particularly among writers in the United States, speaking out against social injustice. Certainly there is a tendency today in (North) American literary poetry circles (as opposed to spoken word) towards the apolitical. But in other parts of the world — where injustice is so blatant and pervasive — shying away from issues of oppression is a luxury poets do not seem to have. Mahmoud Darwish, considered by many the voice of the Palestinian people, is a prime example of this.

Like Pablo Neruda, Darwish not only wrote critically and bravely against his imperialist oppressors, but was also a dedicated activist, which the Israeli State punished him for with 20 years of exile. The impact of Darwish’s moral imagination and his ability to speak to and for a people was evidenced by the tens of thousands of people who attended his funeral in 2008.

Darwish’s friend John Berger, in his touching introduction to *Mural*, the latest translation of the poet’s work in English, provides a profound example of how beloved Darwish was. His grave in Ramallah (until recently fenced off by the Palestinian Authorities) was covered by mourners in sheaves of green wheat and red anemones, as the poet suggested in “Mural.”

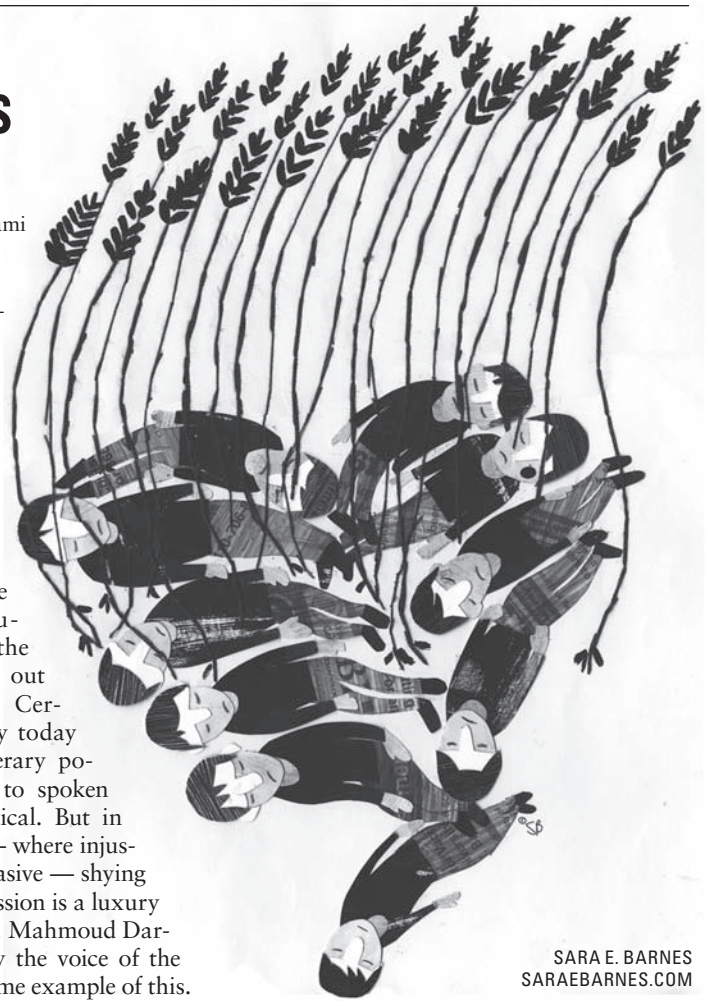
Thanks to Berger, who co-translated *Mural* along with Remi Hammami, the English speaking world is given access for the first time to Darwish’s last poem, “The Dice Player,” as well as another version of “Mural” (first published in 2000).

The image of green wheat and anemones is one of the many in Darwish’s complex masterpiece, “Mural,” that bridges the space between life and death. In the poem, though Darwish is still alive, he also experiences the world beyond the grave. Throughout this journey the poet contrasts the present — life in Israeli-occupied Palestine — with the eschatological realm he is briefly visiting. The former he calls “a wasteland,” and “a festival of the vanquished” whereas the life beyond is green. “Green/the land of my poem is green,” Darwish writes, and “I am the grain that died and became green again/there is something of life in death.”

From a literary standpoint, Darwish is particularly interesting for his engagement with T.S. Eliot and the modern western poetics he, in part, pioneered. Many will recognize in “Mural” allusions to Eliot’s “The Wasteland.” Both poems in this book, like much of Eliot’s work, are written in a sprawling style, use multiple voices and rely on allusions to various spiritual traditions.

Darwish’s use of spiritual traditions is less academic and more mystical than Eliot’s — and his work certainly follows in the canonical tradition of the medieval mystical poetry of the Persian Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz. However, Darwish’s poems, similar to Eliot’s, are also a pastiche of the modern and pre-modern.

But, unlike Eliot’s tight and precise verse, Darwish demonstrates an unbridled mysticism where the language seems to overflow. This technique has more than just aesthetic implications — Darwish is challenging Eliot through his writing style. In the face of Dar-



SARA E. BARNES
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wish’s horrifying material experience and its incalculable spiritual toll, Eliot’s precision and ‘objective’ lyric (Eliot believed the poet’s subjective experience had no place in a poem) are inauthentic expressions of reality.

After the masterpiece that is “Mural,” the second poem, “The Dice Player,” a meditation on chance and fate, perhaps cannot help but be anti-climatic. Throughout the poem Darwish repeatedly asks why he has been permitted to remain alive when so many Palestinians are killed everyday. But his answer to this existential predicament, “I’m nothing but the fall of the dice,” feels unsatisfying, if not a tad banal. More interesting is how the poem operates as a kind of manifesto on his later poetics (his earlier career being taken up with traditional Arabic forms). He declares that his “... vocabulary is mystic and my desires corporeal.” The result is poems like the ones in this book that overflow while being grounded in material reality. Darwish also tells us “I don’t think it was me who wrote the poem/except when inspiration stopped/and inspiration is the luck of the skillful/when they apply themselves.”

Darwish seems to see the role of the poet as neither being the master craftsman that Eliot envisioned or an empty conduit for the divine as a traditional mystic might, but, rather, as an equal collaborator with the eternal. While “The Dice Player,” lacks the depth of “Mural” it is certainly worth reading for understanding (at least a little) how one of the most important poets of this past century viewed his craft.

Both poems in *Mural* attempt to reconcile hope with despair, as well as the spiritual with the temporal. Darwish eschews dichotomies, even when it comes to how he views his oppressor. In “Mural” he states “a small grain of wheat will be enough for us, for me and my brother the enemy.” There is a yearning in this statement for peace, for justice without vengeance, and such a sentiment can only come from a deep love for humanity.

Darwish’s life and work act as an important reminder for poets working in insular academic communities and following in the exclusionary aesthetics of Eliot and other American modernists, that there are poets and places in the world where poetry is written not for other poets and critics, but for the people.

—JACOB SCHEIER

Jacob Scheier is the author of the poetry collection More to Keep us Warm (ECW Press), which was awarded the Governor General’s Literary Award for Poetry in 2008 by the Canada Council for the Arts.

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reader comments

Continued from page 2

IMPROVE ALL SCHOOLS

Response to "Taking the Public Out of Schools," Jan. 29:

The problem is that New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Mayor Bloomberg are working so that few get a quality education. A quality education can be provided at a public school level and at a large school level. It just takes a type of turnaround that Bloomberg/Klein are not interested in trying including small class sizes at every level, an even distribution of students with disabilities, English language learners, straight from Rikers students, full funding for arts/after-school activities and increased pressure on parents for parental involvement beyond elementary school. All of this changes need to happen at once. Not just one aspect at each school. Until then, the deck is stacked against public schools and the statements being made about the quality of public school education are false and made on grounds of predetermined outcomes.

—YOU DON'T GET IT

CAN'T MAKE THE GRADE

Response to "Inside Columbus High School," Jan. 29:

This is an excellent article detailing how NYC Department of Education torpedoes big schools that perform well. When they perform well, what do you do? Change the rules by which you "grade" these schools — so all of the sudden they are under performing.

—PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPPORTER

EDUCATION FACTORY

Response to "The Faces of School Reform," Jan. 29:

I think these are the faces of "reform schools," not school reform. There's nothing good going on for children and their parents in the majority of charter schools. Just the rich getting richer at the expense of the next generation of poor and middle class, who are being criminalized and prepared for factory work or the penal system; both of which continue to profit

the wealthiest of our citizens — it's a win-win for them, and a 50-year step back in history.

—LESLIE

LIVING ON THE INSIDE

Responses to "City Cracks Down on Illegal Hotels," Jan. 29:

I have lived through many years of illegal hoteling in a doorman building on the Upper East Side. It is not just happening in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units. Most are tourists from out of the country. They are taught to say that they rented for a month. I worry about fire sanitation and security. The doormen of this building are usually the ones that check them in and they fear for their jobs if they don't comply. At one time, I had 11 tourists on my floor. Most are short term. Keep up the good work and when I see something I always say something but the officials never get passed the doormen.

—ANONYMOUS



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FRI FEB 26, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

PRESENTATION: "BEYOND WALLS AND CAGES." With Jenna Loyd, Seth Wessler and Manisha Vaze.

SUN FEB 28, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

DISCUSSION: GLOBAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY. George Caffentzis, Silvia Federici and other contributors from the book, *Toward a Global Autonomous University*.

THURS MARCH 4, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

READING: RACE AND U.S. HISTORY. Author David R. Roediger readers from his book, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*.

FRI MARCH 5, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

PRESENTATION: PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY RADIO. Prometheus Radio Project and Palabra Radio discuss how communities in Latin America has been building local media projects.

MON MARCH 8, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

DISCUSSION: RECLAIMING WOMEN'S HEALTH. For International Women's Day, learn about indigenous perspectives on women's health and wellness with Eve Agee.

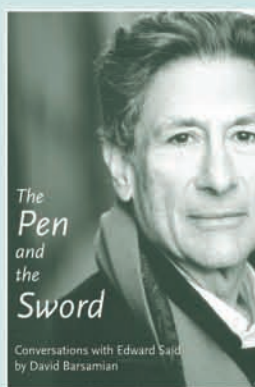
FRI MARCH 12, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

ORGANIZING NEW YORK: U.S. SOCIAL FORM PART 2 OF 5. Participate in a five-part series building towards the second United States Social Forum to be held in Detroit this June.

READ

The Independent
ONLINE

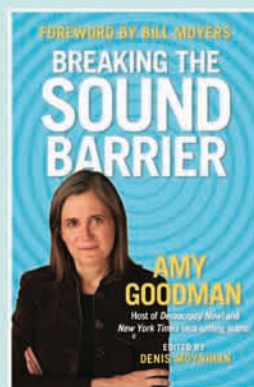
indypendent.org



The Pen and the Sword

David Barsamian, \$15

Conducted during the pivotal years 1989–94, these essential interviews with internationally renowned scholar Edward Said chronicle the defining turning points in the struggle for justice in Palestine.

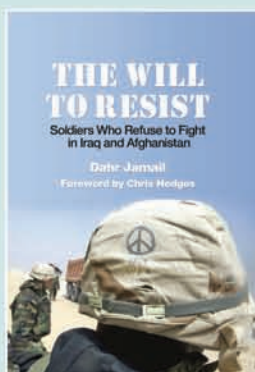


Breaking the Sound Barrier

Amy Goodman, edited by Denis Moynihan • \$16

Amy Goodman, award-winning host of the daily, internationally broadcast radio and television program *Democracy Now!*, breaks through the corporate media's lies, sound-bites, and silence in this wide-ranging new collection of articles, based on her columns for King Features Syndicate.

In place of the usual suspects—the “experts” who, in Goodman's words, “know so little about so much, explain the world to us, and get it so wrong”—this accessible, lively collection allows the voices the corporate media exclude and ignore to be heard loud and clear.

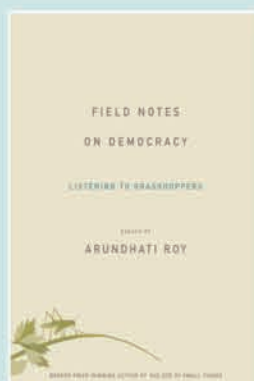


The Will to Resist

Dahr Jamail, \$20

Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan

From struggles against sexism, homophobia, and racism in the military, to soldiers refusing to serve in U.S. occupations, Dahr Jamail documents today's fight for justice within the ranks of world's most powerful military.



Field Notes on Democracy

Arundhati Roy, Listening to Grasshoppers, \$20

“Gorgeously wrought...pitch-perfect prose...In language of terrible beauty, she takes India's everyday tragedies and reminds us to be outraged all over again.” —*Time Magazine*

Combining fierce conviction, deft political analysis, and beautiful writing, this is the essential new book from Arundhati Roy. This series of essays examines the dark side of democracy in contemporary India. It looks closely at how religious majoritarianism, cultural nationalism, and neo-fascism simmer just under the surface of a country that projects itself as the world's largest democracy.

Arundhati Roy will be touring the U.S. this March! Visit www.haymarketbooks.org for details.



IraqiGirl

Hadiya, \$13

Diary of a Teenage Girl in Occupied Mosul

With intimate reflections on family, friendship, and community, *IraqiGirl* allows us to witness the determination of one girl not only to survive, but to create, amidst the devastation of war, a future worth living for.



Essays

Wallace Shawn, \$18.95

In these beautiful essays acclaimed playwright and actor Wallace Shawn takes readers on a revelatory journey through high art, war, politics, culture, and privilege. Whether writing about the genesis of his plays; discussing how the privileged world of arts and letters takes for granted the work of the “unobtrusives”; or describing his upbringing in the sheltered world of Manhattan's cultural elite, Shawn reveals a unique ability to step back from the appearance of things to explore their deeper social meanings.

With his distinctive humor and insight, Shawn invites us to look at the world with new eyes, the better to understand—and change it.



Marx in Soho

Howard Zinn, \$18

A Play on History

Performed by Brian Jones

History's most famous, and oft-misrepresented, radical is resurrected in this one-man performance after agitating with the authorities of the after-life to clear his name.

A Special Howard Zinn Tribute Sat., March 6 at 7:30 pm, Free

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2 WEST 64TH ST

MARX IN SOHO

HOSTED BY
AMY GOODMAN

Please join us at this special tribute performance for the great radical historian Howard Zinn (1922–2010). Best known for his book, *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn's writing and activism has left an indelible mark on our understanding of U.S. history. His most recent work is the acclaimed documentary *The People Speak*. Zinn's play *MARX IN SOHO* is a witty and insightful answer to the question, “If Karl Marx could see the world today, what would he say?” Teacher, actor, and activist Brian Jones has been performing this play all over the country since 1999. An audiobook of his performance, introduced by Howard Zinn, will be released soon by Haymarket Books.

Presented by The New York Society for Ethical Culture and Haymarket Books. Cosponsored by Voices of a People's History, The Brecht Forum, *The Independent*, and Beacon Press.

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